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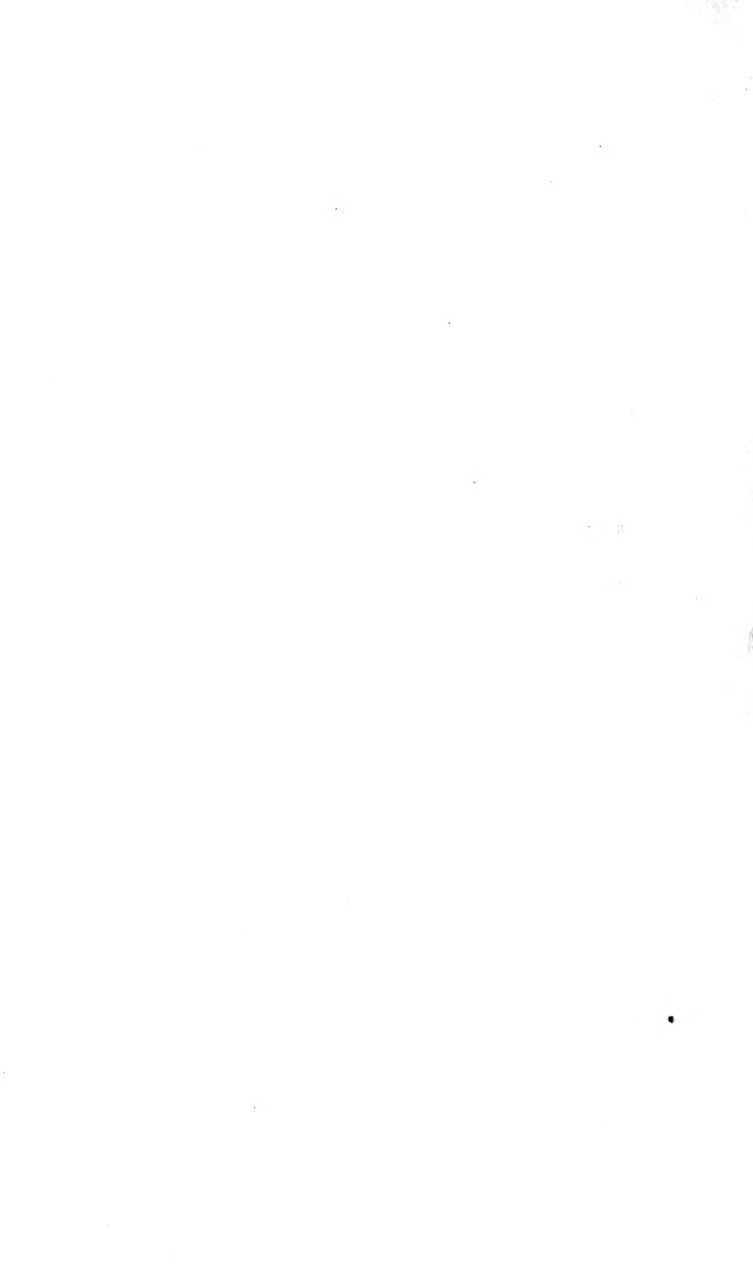


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PART I

THE OLD TESTAMENT STORY

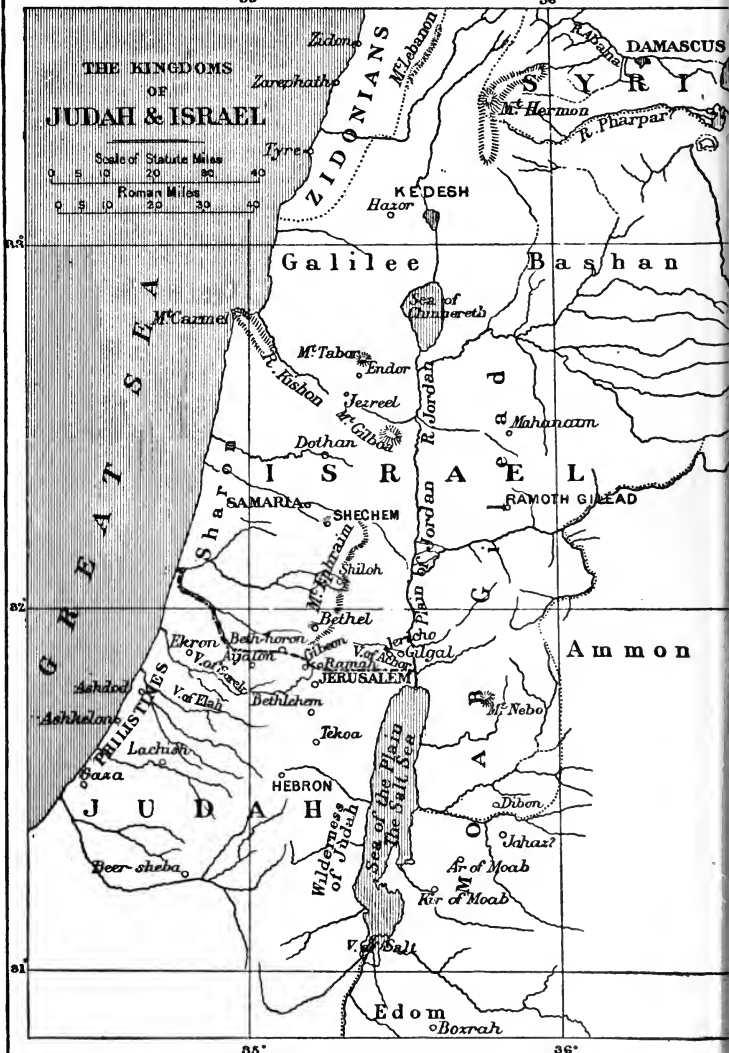
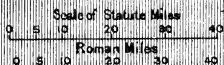




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THE KINGDOMS OF JUDAH & ISRAEL



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THE
OLD TESTAMENT STORY

Tetold for Young People

BY

W. H. BENNETT, M.A.
" "
HACKNEY AND NEW COLLEGES, LONDON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS



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I

THE PATRIARCHS



CHAPTER I

ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS

THE Bible tells us the story of the Jews and of Jesus Christ. All the Old Testament and almost all the New were written by Jews, and Jesus Christ was born a Jew. The history of the Jews is part of the story of Jesus Christ, because it explains how God prepared the way for Christ; how the teaching of the prophets helped men to understand the words of Christ; and how wealth and poverty, victory and defeat, imperial power and shameful slavery, alike fashioned the Jews to be kinsfolk of the Saviour of the world.

The Jews, as we call them, called themselves Israel, or the children of Israel, or, as we should say, the Israelites; and so, in speaking of Old Testament times, we too will call them Israel or the Israelites.

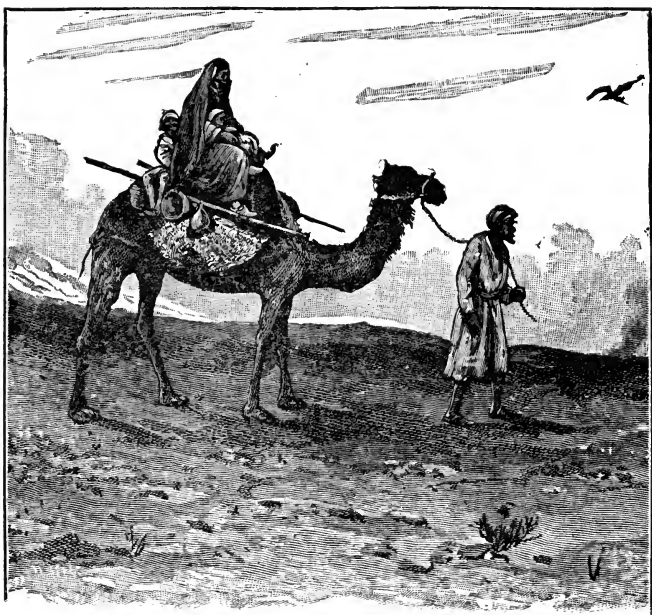
In this chapter we go back to the first beginnings of the Bible and of Israel. To-day there are mill-

ions of Jews scattered all over the world, and there are very many times more Christians. But in the beginning the Israelites, who were the ancestors of the Jews, and whose faith in God was the first step to Christianity, were a few handfuls of people in a corner of Western Asia. The records of their laws and customs, and the stories they told of the events of their history, became, under God's guidance, the beginning of the Bible. Very soon I will tell you some of these stories, but first let us try to picture the people by whom and about whom the stories were told.

In these early days — so early that there are no dates for you to learn about them — the people was not at first called Israel; but the ancestors of the Israelites were nomad tribes wandering like the Bedouin through many lands. They were closely related to the Arabs in race and language, and very similar in manner of life, so that we might almost call them Arabs. They lived in tents, not little white cones of canvas, such as we see in soldiers' camps, but large black tents of goats' hair, often divided into two or three rooms. Their property was camels, cattle, sheep and goats, and slaves.¹ With these the Israelite chiefs, or sheikhs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their clans, wandered to and fro, seeking water and pasture for their flocks. Now they would encamp at some oasis in the desert,

¹ The picture of a "Fellah" or peasant moving might perhaps serve for one of Abraham's followers.

now in the pasture lands of Palestine. There they were neighbours of the Canaanites and Philistines in their towns. Often difficulties arose between the Israelites and their neighbours as to the use of the land and the wells. Sometimes such

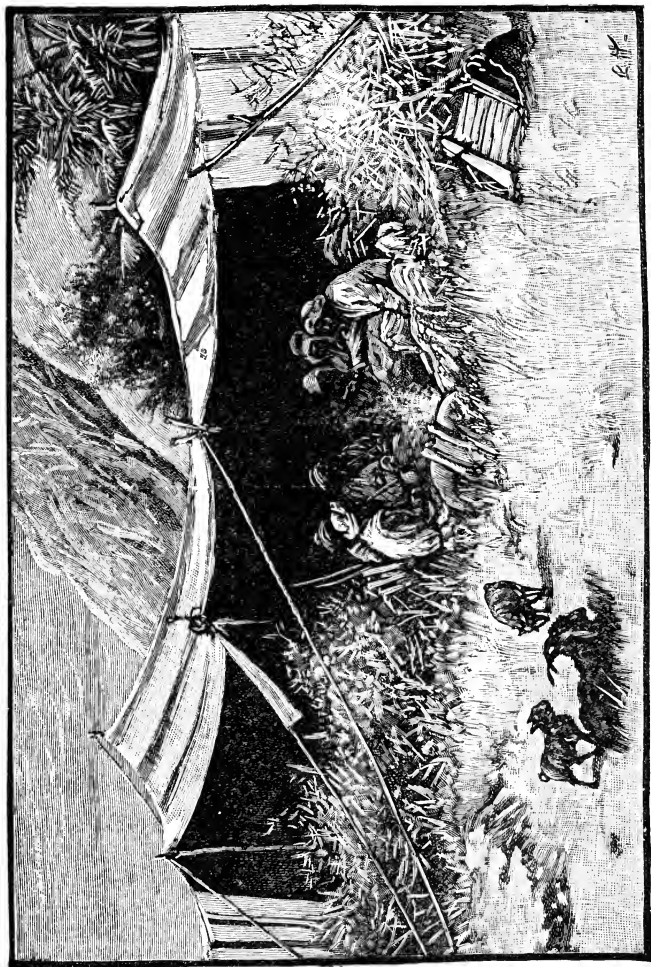


FELLAH "MOVING"

quarrels were settled by friendly agreement, sometimes by fighting. And all the men of a tribe counted each other brethren, and stood by one another in their quarrels; and if one was killed, all the rest held it a most sacred duty to punish

his murderer. So that, though the Israelites and their neighbours were brave and warlike, they did not fight without due cause, lest they should be pursued by the untiring vengeance of the kinsfolk of the slain. We have hardly any stories of battles fought by the patriarchs.

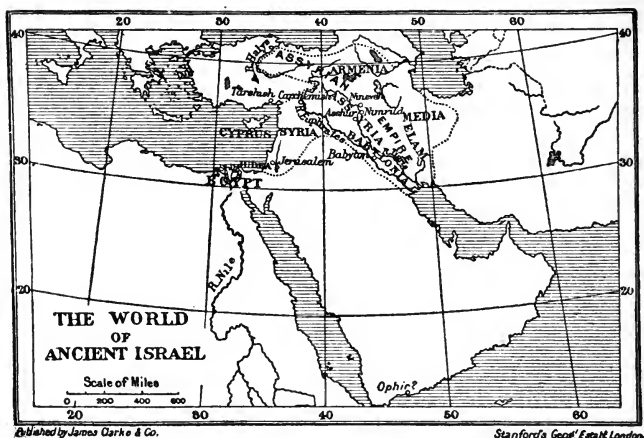
Sometimes in their early wanderings the patriarchs and their followers encamped in the neighbourhood of the great cities of Egypt—cities that were as great and wonderful in their day as London and Paris are now. These Arab sheikhs and their clansmen mingled in the motley crowd of many nations that thronged the streets of Thebes or Memphis, and admired the magnificence of palaces and temples, and the grandeur of great kings and princes. Yet they thought it nobler and better to wander at will through the wide desert than to live cooped up in houses and shut in by city walls. They told how, in days gone by, their fathers had lived among the Chaldeans, who had cities as wonderful as Thebes and Memphis, and who were as great and wise as the Egyptians; and how God, Whom the Israelites called Jehovah, had sent them away from Chaldea to live a nomad life in the pastures of Syria, that they might the better worship and serve Him. And though in later times the Israelites had cities and palaces and temples of their own, they always looked back to their life in tents as a holy and happy time, when their fathers lived very near to God.



INTERIOR OF AN ARAB TENT



So long after, in the time of the kings of Israel and Judah, men still loved to tell the ancient stories of the patriarchs, as the Israelite herdsmen round the camp fire and the maidens at the well told them in days of old. Some of these stories are written for you here.



CHAPTER II

ABRAHAM

ABRAHAM and his wife Sarah lived amongst the Chaldees, by the Euphrates and Tigris, two great rivers north of the Persian Gulf, at a place called Ur. And Jehovah said to Abraham, "Leave your own country and your home and your friends, and go to another country, to which I will show you the way. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you; and the best that a man can wish for his friend will be that he may be as happy as Abraham."

Abraham did as Jehovah told him. Abraham and Sarah had no children, but their nephew Lot

went with them. They left their own country, and journeyed for many weeks with their camels and flocks and herds, their slaves and followers, till they came to Shechem in the land of Canaan. There Jehovah appeared to Abraham, and promised to give that land to his children. And Abraham built an altar to Jehovah at Shechem; and he kept on journeying southward, and built another altar at Bethel. And after journeying into Egypt, Abraham and Lot came back to the altar at Bethel; and each of them had a great many sheep and cattle and tents and followers; and there was not room for them together in the pastures and at the wells. Then Abraham's herdsmen and Lot's herdsmen began to quarrel with each other. And Abraham said to Lot, "We are kinsfolk, we cannot quarrel, and we must not let our servants quarrel. We must separate, that each of us may have room for his flocks and herds. Do you choose a place for yourself: if you take the left hand, I will go to the right; or, if you take the right hand, I will go to the left."

Lot looked and saw that the land by the Jordan was well watered, and he chose all that land for himself, and moved there with all his tents and cattle and followers. Then he went to live in Sodom, a city of that land; though the people of Sodom were very wicked.

But after Lot had gone, Jehovah said to Abraham, "Lift up your eyes and look every way, north, south, east, and west: for all that land will I give

to you and your children. Your children shall be like the dust of the earth ; if any one can count the dust, he will be able to count your descendants." And Abraham journeyed to Hebron, and built another altar.

But while Lot was living in Sodom, four kings from the East invaded Canaan. The kings of the Canaanite cities had been subject to one of these kings, Chedorlaomer, king of Elam, and had paid tribute to him for twelve years. But in the thirteenth year they rebelled, and Chedorlaomer came with three other Eastern kings to punish the Canaanites and make them pay their tribute. These four kings ravaged the country far and wide till they came towards Sodom, and the king of Sodom and four neighbouring kings got together an army and fought against Chedorlaomer. But the four Eastern kings beat the five Canaanite kings, and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were killed. Then Chedorlaomer and his allies plundered Sodom and Gomorrah ; they took all the food they could find, and everything else that was worth carrying away, and a number of prisoners, men, women, and children, and set off on their homeward march. Amongst these prisoners, of whom they intended to make slaves, were Lot and his wife and daughters.

But one of Lot's servants escaped, and went and told Abraham that his nephew was being carried off as a slave. Then Abraham started with his tribe of more than three hundred men to rescue Lot.

The invaders were marching northwards, by way of Damascus, and Abraham followed on their track for some days. At last he overtook them, far away in the north ; he surprised their camp at night, and they fled panic-stricken by the sudden attack, so that Abraham rescued Lot and the other prisoners, and recovered the plunder, and took them back to Sodom and Gomorrah. On the way there came out to meet Abraham, Melchizedek, king of Salem, or Jerusalem. Melchizedek was also, like many ancient kings, the priest of his city—the priest of El Elyon, or God Most High, the name under which God was then worshipped at Jerusalem. He brought bread and wine for Abraham and his followers, and blessed Abraham, who gave him a tenth of the spoil. The new king of Sodom, too, came to meet Abraham ; he offered to let Abraham keep all the other plunder if he would release the prisoners whom he had rescued. “Give me the men and women,” said the king of Sodom, “and take the goods for yourself.”

“I have sworn,” answered Abraham, “by Jehovah, El Elyon, Lord of heaven and earth, that I will not take even a thread or a shoe-latchet, lest you should say, I have made Abraham rich.” So Lot and his wife and daughters went back to Sodom, and lived there till Jehovah rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and destroyed them, and all the people in them, because of their wickedness. God told Abraham of His purpose, and Abraham

entreated God to spare Sodom, and God promised to spare it if there were ten righteous men in it. But Lot and his family were the only righteous people, and God sent angels to bring them out of the city.

CHAPTER III

ISAAC

GOD often promised Abraham that his descendants should be a great nation, and yet Abraham and Sarah had no child through whom these promises could be fulfilled. The years went on, and they grew very old. Abraham had a son Ishmael by another wife, a slave of Sarah's; but though Ishmael, too, became the father of a nation, the great promises made to Abraham did not refer to him. God promised that Abraham and Sarah should have a son, and at last the son was born. Sarah called his name Isaac, "Laughter," because it seemed so ridiculous that two old people should have a son. Now that Sarah had a boy of her own, she persuaded Abraham to send Ishmael and his mother away, in order that Ishmael might not prevent Isaac from succeeding his father as head of the tribe.

"After these things," the story goes on, perhaps when Isaac was twelve or fourteen, God tried Abraham, to see if he would obey Him when obedience was very hard. In ancient times men chiefly worshipped God by sacrifices, by offering Him gifts, and especially by killing animals and burning part or all of them on an altar. Oxen and sheep were

precious possessions, and men showed their love and gratitude and loyalty by giving God their best. But a man had possessions even more precious than sheep and oxen, he had his children; and when an Eastern people was specially anxious to show its devotion to God, men killed and burnt their own children on the altar as sacrifices. Such sacrifices were common among the Canaanites, and were sometimes offered by the Israelites themselves.

"After these things," then, to go back to the Bible story, after Isaac was born and Ishmael sent away, and other things had happened, and when Abraham was encamped at Beer-sheba, in the south of Palestine, God tried Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham."

And he said, "Here am I."

God said, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." So Abraham got up early in the morning, and saddled an ass, and took with him two servants and his son Isaac; and he cleft wood for the burnt-offering, and set out for the place of which God had told him. And on the third day of their journey, Abraham looked and saw the place afar off; and he said to his servants, "Stay here with the ass; and I and the boy will go yonder, and will worship, and come back to you."

Then he took the wood for the burnt-offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and took the fire and

the knife in his hand. So they two went together.

And Isaac said to his father, "My father."

He said, "Here am I, my son."

"Here are fire and wood," said Isaac, "but where is the sheep for the burnt-offering?"

Abraham said, "God will provide Himself a sheep for the burnt-offering, my son." So they went both of them together, until they came to the place of which God had told Abraham. Then he built an altar and laid the wood in order on it, and took Isaac and bound him, and placed him on the altar over the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to kill his son.

But the angel of God called to him out of heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

And he said, "Here am I."

The angel of God said, "Do not lay your hand upon the boy to harm him; for now I know that you fear God, because you were ready to give me your son, your only son."

Then Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and saw behind him a ram caught in a thicket by its horns; and he took the ram and offered it up for a burnt-offering instead of Isaac; and Abraham and Isaac went back to the servants, and they all went together to Abraham's camp at Beer-sheba.

When the Israelites read this story they understood that God had never intended Abraham to kill Isaac, and that He did not wish them to sacrifice

children to Him. The neighbouring peoples believed that God was cruel and selfish, and wished men to worship Him by making themselves uncomfortable and sad, and by torturing themselves ; but the revelation which God gave to Israel taught them that God was a Father to His people.

When Isaac was old enough to marry, Abraham, after the custom of those times, found a wife for him. He would not let Isaac marry any of their Canaanite neighbours, but sent Eliezer, his chief slave, the overseer of his household, to his own relations in the East for a wife for Isaac. Eliezer took ten camels loaded with provisions for the journey and presents for Isaac's future wife and her family, and journeyed till he came to the home of Nahor, Abraham's brother, in Mesopotamia. And in the evening, at the time when women go to draw water, he made his camels kneel down outside the town by the well. And he prayed to God and said:

“Jehovah, God of my master Abraham, send me good speed to-day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. May the maiden to whom I shall say, ‘Let down your pitcher, I pray you, that I may drink,’ and who shall say to me, ‘Drink, and I will give your camels drink too’ — may she be the maiden whom Thou hast chosen for Isaac's wife.”

Before he had done speaking, a beautiful girl, named Rebekah, Isaac's cousin, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came to the well with her pitcher on her shoulder, and



WOMAN CARRYING WATER-JAR



went down to the fountain and filled her pitcher, and came up again. Then Eliezer ran to meet her and said, "I pray you, give me a little water out of your pitcher."

And she said, "Drink, my lord."

And she let down her pitcher quickly on her hand and gave him to drink. And when he had finished, she said, "I will draw water for your camels too, till they have had enough to drink."

The man gazed at her in silence, wondering whether Jehovah was really showing him that she was to be Isaac's wife; but when the camels had done drinking, he took a nose-ring and bracelets of gold, and said, "Whose daughter are you? Tell me, I pray you. Is there room for us to spend the night in your father's house?"

She answered, "I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor and his wife Milcah; we have straw and fodder for the camels, and room for you to spend the night."

Then Eliezer bowed down and worshipped Jehovah, and said, "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of my master Abraham, who has not failed to be kind and true to my master, and has led me to the home of his kinsfolk."

While he was thanking God, Rebekah ran to the harem, the women's rooms, and told them what had happened. Afterwards her brother Laban saw the nose-ring and bracelets of gold, and his sister told him about Eliezer. Then Laban ran out and found

Eliezer standing by the camels at the fountain, and said, "Come in, thou blessed of Jehovah; why do you stand without? I have made ready for you and your camels."

So Eliezer went to the house, and Laban took off the camels' harness and gave them straw and fodder, and brought water that Eliezer and his men might wash their feet. Then Laban set food before him, but he said, "I will not eat till I have told my errand."

And Laban said, "Speak on."

Then Eliezer told him the whole story from the beginning, almost in the same words as I have told it: how he was Abraham's slave, how Abraham was very great and rich, and wished his son Isaac to marry one of his own kinsfolk, and how God had shown Eliezer that Rebekah was to be Isaac's wife. "And now," he said, "if you will be kind and true to my master, tell me, and if not, tell me, that I may turn right or left."

Then Laban answered, "Jehovah has decided, we can say nothing. Here is Rebekah; take her and go, and let her marry your master's son, according to the word of Jehovah."

So Eliezer thanked God, and brought out jewels of silver and gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah, and gave also rich presents to her brother and mother. Then they all feasted, and Eliezer and his men spent the night there, and early next morning he said, "Send me away to my master."

But her brother and mother said, "Let Rebekah stay with us a few days."

And he said, "Do not hinder me, since Jehovah has prospered me, let me go to my master."

Then they said, "Rebekah shall decide for herself." Rebekah was eager to start at once, so they let her go, and wished her all happiness, and said, "O our sister, mayest thou become thousands of myriads, may thy descendants possess the gate of them that hate them."

So Rebekah and her foster-mother and her maidens rode away on the camels with Eliezer and his men, and they journeyed many days.

Meanwhile, Isaac had gone to live at a place called Beer-lahai-roi, south of Judah; and one day as he was walking in the fields in the evening, he saw camels coming. And Rebekah, for these were Eliezer's camels, looked and saw a man coming towards them; and she said to Eliezer, "Who is that man in the fields walking to meet us?"

And he answered, "It is my master Isaac."

Then she took her veil and covered herself. And Eliezer told Isaac everything, and Isaac married Rebekah and took her to his tent.

The end of this story says nothing about Abraham — perhaps he was dead before Eliezer came back.

CHAPTER IV

JACOB AND ESAU

FOR a long time after Isaac and Rebekah were married they had no children; but Isaac prayed to God, and He gave them two sons, Esau the elder, and Jacob the younger. When they grew up Esau spent his time chasing deer and buffalo, because he was a clever hunter; but Jacob was a quiet man, and stayed at home amongst the tents, and looked after the flocks and herds. Esau was his father's favourite, for Isaac was fond of game, and Jacob was his mother's darling. One day Jacob was making lentil soup, and Esau came home from his hunting, tired and hungry. "Make haste," said he to Jacob, "and give me some of that red stuff, that red stuff there."

But Jacob said to Esau, "First sell me your birthright."

Now, because Esau was the elder son, he would have had the birthright — that is, he would have been the head of the tribe after Isaac's death, and the heir to his property. Yet Esau said, "I must die sooner or later, and then what will be the use of my birthright?"

So he consented to sell the chieftainship and the inheritance for a basin of soup. Jacob made him

swear to keep the bargain, and then gave him soup and bread, and Esau ate and drank, and got up and went his way : so Esau made light of his birthright.

Years afterwards Isaac lay dying, old and almost blind, and he called Esau and said, "I am so old that I may die any day ; take your bow and arrows, and go out hunting and get me game ; and make me savoury meat such as I love, and bring it me that I may eat of it and bless you before I die."

Now Rebekah was listening while Isaac talked to Esau, and when Esau had gone out to shoot the game, she said to Jacob, "I have just heard your father tell Esau to get him game and make him savoury meat that he may eat, and that before he die he may bless Esau in the name of Jehovah. Now, my son, you must do exactly as I bid you : get me two goodly kids from the flock, and I will make them into savoury meat for your father, such as he loves. Then you must take it to your father, that he may eat it and give his last blessing to you instead of to Esau."

"But," said Jacob, "Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth. Perhaps my father will feel me and think that I am a buffoon or playing the fool, and I shall bring on myself a curse and not a blessing."

But Rebekah said, "On me be the curse ; do as I tell you, and get me the kids."

So he fetched them, and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved. Then she took Esau's best clothes, which she was taking care of for him,

and put them on Jacob ; and she covered the smooth skin of Jacob's hands and neck with the hairy skin of the kids ; and she gave him the savoury meat and bread, and he went to his father.

And he said, " My father."

Isaac answered, " Here am I ; who are you, my son ?"

Jacob said to his father, " I am Esau, your first-born. I have done what you told me ; rise now, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me."

" How, then," said Isaac, " have you found it so quickly ?"

" Because," said he, " Jehovah thy God put it in my way."

But Isaac said, " Come closer, my son, that I may feel you, and find out whether or no you are my son Esau."

So Jacob went close to Isaac, and he felt him, and did not recognize him, because the skins made his hands hairy like Esau's ; and Isaac said, " The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau. Are you really my son Esau ?"

Jacob said, " I am."

Then Isaac said, " Put the savoury meat before me, that I may eat of my son's game, and may bless you."

Then Jacob put the meat before him ; when he had eaten it, he brought his father wine, and Isaac drank it, and said, " Come close to me and kiss me, my son."

Jacob went to his father and kissed him, and Isaac smelt the smell of his clothes and blessed him, and said :

“The smell of my son is as the smell of a field which Jehovah has blessed.

“God give thee of the dew of heaven,
And of the fatness of the earth,
And plenty of corn and wine.

Let peoples serve thee,
Let nations bow down to thee.

Be thou a lord over thy brethren,
Let thy mother's sons bow down to thee ;

Cursed be every one that curseth thee,
Blessed be every one that blesseth thee.”

As soon as Isaac had finished the blessing, and Jacob had left him, Esau came in from his hunting. He, too, made savoury meat, and brought it to his father, and said to him, “Rise, my father, and eat of your son's venison, that you may bless me.”

“Who are you ? ” said Isaac.

“I am your son,” said he, “your first-born, Esau.”

Then Isaac shook and trembled in every limb, and said, “Who was it, then, who brought me game, so that I ate of all before you came, and blessed him ? Yea, and he shall be blessed.”

At his father's words Esau uttered a cry, exceeding loud and bitter, and said, “Bless me, me also, my father.”

But Isaac said, "Your brother has cheated you of your blessing."

Esau said, "Is it because he is named Supplanter¹ that he has twice supplanted me? First he took my birthright, and now he has taken my blessing. Have you not kept back a blessing for me?"

"I have made him your master," answered Isaac; "I have made all his kinsfolk his slaves, and I have given him the corn and wine for his portion. What, then, can I do for you, my son?"

Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

Then said Isaac,

"Yea, far from the fatness of the earth be thy dwelling,
And far from the dew of the heavens.
Thou shalt live by thy sword, and be thy brother's slave,
But, when thou strivest, thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck."

In the following chapters you will hear how Jacob and Rebekah were punished for telling and acting lies to a blind old man on his death-bed, the husband of Rebekah, the father of Jacob.

¹ Jacob means Supplanter.

CHAPTER V

JACOB AND LABAN

ESAU longed to be revenged on Jacob, and only waited till Isaac was dead and buried. But Rebekah sent Jacob away to her brother Laban at Haran. So Jacob started from Beer-sheba to go to Haran, just as Eliezer did when he went to find a wife for Isaac. And at the end of his first day's journey, he lay down to sleep with a stone for his pillow. And he dreamt, and in his dream he saw a ladder set on the earth, with its top in the skies, and the angels of God went up and down it. Then Jehovah stood beside Jacob, and said, "I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac," and Jehovah promised that Jacob's children should be a great and mighty nation.

When he awoke he was afraid, and said, "Certainly Jehovah is in this place, and I knew it not. How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven." Then Jacob set up his stone pillow for a sacred pillar, and poured oil on the top of it as an offering to Jehovah. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me on my journey, and give me bread to eat and clothes to

wear, and bring me safely home again, then this pillar shall be a temple of God, and I will give Thee a tenth of all that Thou givest me."

And he called the place *Bethel*, which means *House of God* or *Temple*; and after the Israelites conquered Canaan they worshipped God at the temple at Bethel, and paid tithes to the priests there.

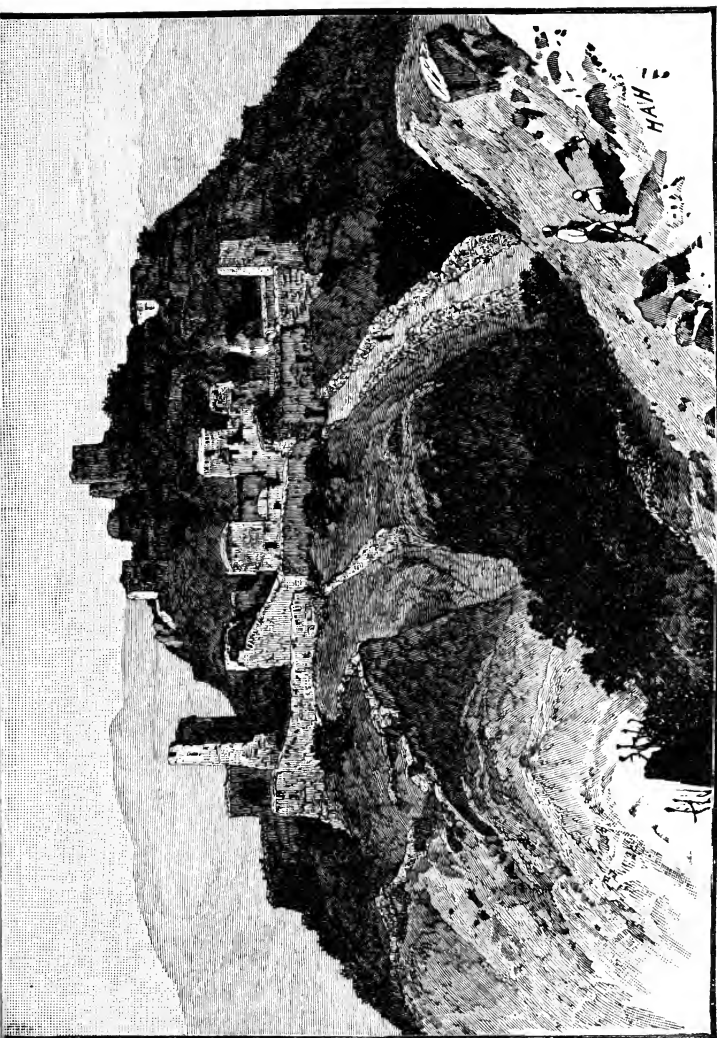
And Jacob went on his journey, and after many days he came to a well, with three flocks of sheep lying by it; and the shepherds told him they belonged to Haran. Then Jacob knew that he had reached the end of his journey, and he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?"

They said, "We do."

"Is he well?" said Jacob.

They said, "Yes, and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

When Jacob saw his cousin Rachel with her sheep, he went to the well and rolled back the great stone that covered it, and drew water for the sheep. Then he kissed Rachel, and wept aloud for joy that he had come safely to his kinsfolk; and he told Rachel that he was her cousin, and she ran and told her father Laban. When Laban heard that his sister Rebekah's son had come, he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and took him to his house; and Jacob told him all that had happened. So Jacob lived with Laban, and helped him with his flocks and herds. Laban offered to pay him wages, but Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel, who was very



BETHEL



beautiful; and he said to Laban, "I will be your servant for seven years, if you will let me marry your younger daughter Rachel."

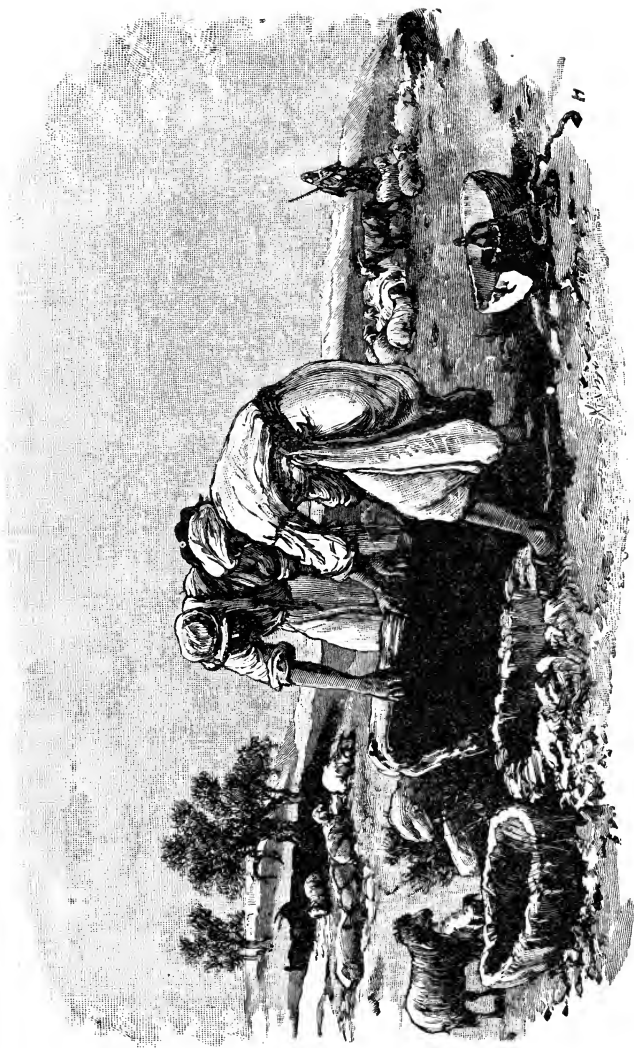
Laban agreed, and Jacob worked seven years to get Rachel, and they seemed to him only a few days because of his great love to her. At the end of the seven years, Laban pretended that he was going to give Rachel to Jacob. He invited all the neighbours to the wedding, and made a great feast for them. The bride was brought in veiled, and Jacob supposed it was Rachel; but when the wedding was over, he found out that he had married her elder sister Leah, and he was very angry. But Laban explained that in Haran the elder sister was always married first, and he offered to let Jacob marry Rachel too next week, if he would work for him another seven years; and Jacob consented, and married Rachel as well as Leah. And Rachel and Leah were jealous of each other, and made Jacob's life a burden to him by their quarrelling. Later on, he married also two slave-girls, Bilhah, Rachel's maid, and Zilpah, Leah's maid; and he had twelve sons and a daughter. When the second seven years were ended, he agreed to work for Laban for a certain portion of the lambs of his flocks; and Laban and Jacob were always trying to get the better of each other in the matter of wages, but Jacob was cleverer than Laban, and Jacob got rich and Laban got poor. Then Laban and his sons hated Jacob, and Jacob was afraid they would rob him, or per-

haps even kill him ; so he fled away by night with his flocks and herds and slaves, and his wives and children, to go back to Canaan. When Laban heard that they had gone, he gathered his kinsfolk together and pursued them, and in three days he overtook them. But God would not let Laban harm Jacob. So when Jacob had promised that he would be kind to Laban's daughters, Laban left him and went home again.

And now Jacob bethought him of Esau, and he sent to tell Esau that he was on his way home ; and the messengers returned to Jacob and said, "We found your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you with four hundred men."

Then Jacob was terribly frightened. He got ready a present for Esau — two hundred and twenty goats, two hundred and twenty sheep, thirty camels, fifty oxen, and thirty asses. He arranged them in separate droves, each with a slave to drive it ; and Jacob said to each of the slaves, "When my brother Esau meets you, and asks who you are and to whom the cattle belong, you must say, 'They belong to your slave Jacob ; it is a present sent to my lord Esau.'"

So the present for Esau was sent on in front, one drove after the other, and behind came the other slaves and flocks and herds, and then the wives and children. Jacob put Bilhah and Zilpah and their children first, Leah and her children next, and last of all his beloved Rachel and his darling Joseph, her



SHEPHERDS REMOVING STONE FROM WELL-MOUTH



son, that they might have the best chance of escaping if Esau was still vindictive. When Jacob saw Esau and the four hundred men coming, he went on in front to meet them, and prostrated himself on the ground seven times before Esau. But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they both wept. And Esau proposed that he and Jacob should live together, but Jacob made excuses, and they separated.

CHAPTER VI

JOSEPH THE SPOILT DARLING

AFTER Jacob left Esau, Rachel had a son Benjamin, and died when he was born; but for a long time before, she had only one son, Joseph, and he was Jacob's youngest child; and Rachel was his favourite wife. Jacob loved Joseph more than all his other sons, because he was the son of his old age; and he made him a long robe with sleeves, such as princes wore. So his brothers hated him, and could scarcely bring themselves to speak a civil word to him.

Once Joseph had a dream, and told it to his brothers. "I dreamed," said he, "that we were binding sheaves in the harvest field, and my sheaf arose and stood upright; and your sheaves came round about and bowed to my sheaf."

His brothers answered, "Do you really think you are going to be king over us?" and they hated him more than ever.

Soon after he had another dream, and told it to his brothers. "I dreamed," said he, "that the sun and moon and eleven stars bowed down to me."

Then his father rebuked him, and said, "What an absurd dream! Am I, and your brothers, and your mother to bow down before you?"

And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the dreams in mind.

Now, sometimes Joseph went with his brothers to help them keep the sheep, and he used to come home to his father and tell tales about his brothers. Once they went to feed their father's flock in Shechem. Afterwards Jacob sent Joseph to go and see his brothers, and bring back word about them. But when Joseph got to Shechem, his brothers were gone, and as he was wandering about looking for them, he met a man who told him that they had gone to Dothan; and he went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. And they saw him coming, and said to each other, "Here is this dreamer. Let us kill him, and throw his body into one of the cisterns,¹ and say that a wild beast has devoured him; and we will see what will come of his dreams."

But the eldest brother Reuben said, "Do not shed blood, throw him into this cistern, do not hurt him."

Now Reuben intended, some time when the rest were not there, to take Joseph out of the cistern, and send him safely home to his father.

So when Joseph came to them, they stripped off his princely robe, and threw him into a cistern without any water in it, and went away and left him there.

And when they were gone, there passed by some Midianite merchants, and they drew Joseph out of

¹ Pits for holding water, often empty.

the cistern, and took him away to sell him for a slave.

Later on, Reuben came back to the cistern to take Joseph cut and send him home, but he was nowhere to be found. Reuben tore his clothes in his grief, and went back to his brothers, and said, "The boy is gone; and I, whither shall I go?"

Then they took the robe, and killed a goat, and dipped the robe in its blood, and brought it to Jacob, and said, "We have found this; is it Joseph's robe?"

And Jacob recognized it, and said, "It is my son's robe; a wild beast has devoured him: Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces."

And he tore his clothes, and put on sackcloth, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted, and said, "Mourning will I go down to my son in the land of the spirits of the dead."

Meanwhile the Midianites took Joseph down into Egypt, and sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguard.

CHAPTER VII

JOSEPH IN PRISON

GOD helped Joseph when he was a slave in Egypt, so that he was able to do his work well. His master saw that he was clever, and industrious, and faithful; and set him over all his fellow-servants, and over his house and fields and cattle, and all that he had. Then God blessed Potiphar's house for Joseph's sake, and the blessing of Jehovah, the God of Israel, was upon all that he had in the house and in the field. Potiphar trusted everything to Joseph, and asked for no account of anything, so that he knew nothing about his house and his estate, except that he had a good dinner every day.

But Potiphar's wife was a wicked woman, and brought false charges against Joseph, so that Potiphar was angry, and had him put in prison. And still Jehovah was with Joseph, and showed him kindness, so that the governor of the prison was pleased with him, and trusted him just as Potiphar had done. The governor put Joseph in authority over all his fellow-prisoners, and did not ask for any account of what he did, and Joseph managed everything well, because Jehovah was with him.

When Joseph had been in prison a long time, there were brought in two new prisoners, two great

nobles from the court of Pharaoh, King of Egypt, the Chief Baker and the Chief Cupbearer. They had offended the King, and he had sent them to prison; and the governor put Joseph in charge of them. One morning he found them looking very sad, and asked them why they were so downcast, and in such low spirits; and they said, "We have each of us dreamed a dream, and there is no one to interpret."

And Joseph said, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me the dreams."

Then the Chief Cupbearer said, "In my dream I saw a vine with three branches; and while I looked at it, it seemed to bud, and the buds grew into blossoms, and there grew clusters of ripe grapes. And I had Pharaoh's cup in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and gave it into Pharaoh's hand."

Joseph said, "This is the interpretation: the three branches are three days; in three days Pharaoh will take you out of prison, and make you Chief Cupbearer again. Then, I pray you, remember me, and tell Pharaoh about me, that I, too, may be taken out of prison; for I was stolen away from my own country, and I have been put into prison on a false charge."

When the Chief Baker saw that the interpretation was good, he said, "In *my* dream I had three baskets of white bread on my head, and in the top basket there were all manner of dainties for Pharaoh,

and the birds ate them out of the basket on my head."

Joseph said, "This is the interpretation : the three baskets are three days ; in three days Pharaoh will cut your head off, and hang you on a tree ; and the birds shall eat your flesh off your bones."

And the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he made a feast for all his courtiers, and he had the Chief Baker and Chief Cupbearer brought before him, and restored the Chief Cupbearer to his office, and hanged the Chief Baker, just as Joseph had said. Yet the Chief Cupbearer forgot all about Joseph.

But, two years after, Pharaoh had a bad dream one night ; and he awoke in the morning anxious and frightened, and sent for all his magicians and wise men, and asked them to interpret his dream ; but none of them could tell him what it meant. Then said the Chief Cupbearer, "One night, when the Chief Baker and I were in prison, we each of us had a dream. And we told our dreams to a young Hebrew,¹ and he interpreted them ; and the interpretation came true—the Chief Baker was hanged, and I was restored to my office."

Then Pharaoh sent to the prison to fetch Joseph.

¹ People of other nations called the Israelites "Hebrews."

CHAPTER VIII

JOSEPH THE RULER OF EGYPT

So the messengers came to fetch Joseph to the court. They hurried him out of the prison, and he changed his prison clothes for others, and shaved himself, and went with them to Pharaoh.

And Pharaoh said, "I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one that can interpret it; and I have been told that, if you hear a dream, you can interpret it."

Joseph answered, "It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace."

Then Pharaoh said, "In my dream I stood upon the brink of the Nile, and seven fat, sleek cows came up out of the Nile and fed amongst the reeds; and there came up after them seven poor, lean, ugly cows, the worst I ever saw in all Egypt; and the lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows; and when they had eaten them up, no one could have known that they had had anything to eat, they were as ugly as they were before.

"Afterwards I dreamed another dream. There came up on one stalk seven full and good ears, and there sprung up after them seven other ears, withered, thin, and blasted with the east wind; and the thin ears swallowed up the good ears."

Joseph said, "The two dreams are one. The seven good cows and the seven good ears both mean the same seven years of plenty; and the seven lean cows and the seven blasted ears both mean the same seven years of famine. God sent this dream to tell Pharaoh that there shall be seven good harvests in Egypt, and then seven bad harvests, and the famine shall consume the land so that the good harvests shall be forgotten; and the dream was doubled because God's purpose is fixed, and shall soon be accomplished. Now, therefore, let Pharaoh find a sensible, capable man, and let him store up corn in the good years against the years of famine."

And Joseph's advice pleased Pharaoh and all his court, and the king said, "Since God has showed you all this, there is no one as sensible and capable as you are. You shall be over my house and rule my people; without you no one shall stir hand or foot in all Egypt. Only I myself, the king, will be greater than you."

Then Pharaoh took off his signet-ring and put it on Joseph's finger, and arrayed him in princely robes, and made him ride in the second-best royal chariot. So Joseph rode in state through the city, and heralds went before him and cried out, "Bow the knee."

And Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife — Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian priest. Now, in Egypt, — the priests were great nobles and very rich.

So Joseph was Pharaoh's Grand Vizier or prime

minister, and ruled all Egypt. When the seven good harvests came, he stored up thousands and thousands of sacks of corn, and at last he had more sacks than he could count, and the corn in the granaries was like the sand on the seashore. Then came the years of famine, and Joseph sold corn out of his granaries to all the Egyptians.

And the famine was in the countries round about, so that many foreigners came into Egypt to buy corn, and Joseph sat in state and received them, and gave them permission to buy. One day there came amongst the other foreigners Joseph's ten brethren — all except Benjamin. And they bowed humbly to the great Egyptian prince, and did not know that it was Joseph, the lad whom they threw into the cistern. Joseph knew them, and remembered how he had dreamed that they should bow down before him. But he behaved as if he were a stranger to them, and accused them of being spies from some enemies' country.

And they said, "We are no spies, we are true men. Thy servants are twelve brothers from Canaan, but one of our brothers is dead, and our youngest brother is at home with his father."

But Joseph put them in prison for three days, and then he said to them, "I will give you a chance of proving that you are honest men: one of you must stay here in prison, but the rest may go home, and take food to feed your families. But you must come back again, and bring me your

youngest brother, that I may know that you told me the truth when you said you had another brother."

And they said to one another in Joseph's presence, "We are being punished for our cruelty to Joseph, because we would not listen to his entreaties when he was in trouble."

They thought that this Egyptian prince could not understand their Canaanite language, because Joseph had talked with them by means of an interpreter. But Joseph understood it all, and he turned from them and wept.

Then Simeon — one of the brothers — was left behind in prison, and the rest started for Canaan with their sacks full of corn; and when they halted on the first night, one of them opened his sack to get some corn to give to his ass, and he found the money he had paid for his corn put back at the top of his sack; and so it was in all the other sacks. And they were puzzled and frightened, but Joseph had had it put there, because he would not take money from his brothers for the food he gave them.

And the brothers came home to Jacob and Benjamin, and told the whole story; and, when the corn was finished, they wished to take Benjamin and go to Egypt to buy more corn, and bring Simeon home. But at first Jacob would not let Benjamin go. He said, "Me have you bereaved of my children; Joseph is not, and Simeon is not,

and you will take Benjamin away ; all these things are against me."

But, at last, when they seemed likely to starve for want of corn, they persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go with them. So the eleven brothers went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph as he sat in state to sell corn to the foreigners. And when Joseph saw that Benjamin was with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take the men into my house, and prepare a feast, for they must dine with me at noon." And the steward did as Joseph said ; and, when Joseph came home to dinner, his brothers were there to meet him, and still they did not know him.

And he said to them, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke ?"

And they said, "Thy servant our father is well ; he is still alive."

X And he looked and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "God be gracious unto thee, my son."

X Then he altogether broke down. He was greatly moved at the sight of Benjamin, and he hurried out and went to his own room to weep alone. And when he was himself again, he washed his face, and came back to the banquet-hall, and bade them serve the dinner. And they laid three tables, one for Joseph, one for the Egyptians, and one for the Hebrew strangers, for the Egyptians thought it wicked to eat with foreigners. Joseph placed his brothers according to their age, the oldest first, and

the youngest last, and they wondered how he knew their ages. And he sent portions to them from his own table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any one else's.

Next day the eleven brothers started home again, with their sacks filled with corn. But Joseph had had a silver cup hidden in Benjamin's sack, and sent his steward after them. The steward caught them up, and accused them of stealing the cup; and, when he had searched in all the sacks, he found the cup in Benjamin's. Then he took them all back to Joseph's house; and Joseph said that Benjamin must be a slave, but the rest might go home. X

Then Judah reminded Joseph that Benjamin had only come to Egypt because Joseph asked for him. "Now, therefore," said he, "when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad is not with us; since his life is bound up in the lad's life, when he sees that the lad is not with us, he will die, and thy servants shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave. I pray thee, let me stay to be thy slave instead of the lad, and let him go with his brothers. How can I go home without him, and see my father's grief?" C

Then Joseph could not contain himself any longer, and he made all the Egyptians go out, so that he was left alone with his brothers. And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard him outside. And he said to his brothers, "I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?" X

X And his brothers were troubled, and could not answer him ; but he bade them not be grieved or angry with themselves because they had wronged him, for God had brought good out of their evil, and made him a saviour of Egypt and of his own people from the famine. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers, and they all talked together.

And they heard about it in Pharaoh's court. They said, "Joseph's brothers are come," and Pharaoh and his courtiers were glad. Pharaoh bade Joseph send wagons to fetch his father and his brothers' wives and children down into Egypt. And Joseph sent the wagons with his brothers, and sent presents for his father, and food for the journey.

They came to Jacob and said, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt."


His heart fainted, because he could not believe them. But when they told him the whole story, and showed him the wagons, his spirit revived, and he said, "It is enough ; Joseph my son is still alive ; I will go and see him before I die."

So they all journeyed to Egypt ; and Joseph came in his chariot to meet Jacob, and fell on his neck and wept a good while. And Joseph brought Jacob into the presence of King Pharaoh, and Pharaoh asked Jacob how old he was.

Jacob said, "I am a hundred and thirty years old. Few and evil have been the years of my life ; they

have not been so many as the years of my fathers in the days of their sojournings.”

Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence. And Pharaoh gave the Israelites (that is, Jacob and his sons and their tribe, for Jacob was also called Israel) the land of Goshen for their flocks and herds, and they dwelt there.



II

MOSES AND JOSHUA

CHAPTER I

THE SON OF PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER

WHEN the Israelites came to Egypt, they lived very much as they did before. Their wealth was still their flocks and herds; they lived in tents, and roamed about from one pasture to another. Only they did not wander through many different lands, but kept in Goshen, on the borders of Egypt. The years went on; first Jacob died, and then Joseph; and the king who had made Joseph his prime minister died. After a while there was a king of Egypt who forgot how Joseph had saved the country in the time of the famine; but he saw that the Israelites were growing into a great people. And he said to his captains and chief men, "These Israelites are too many and too mighty for us; and perhaps, when we are at war, they will join our enemies and fight against us."

So, to break the spirit of the Israelites, the Egyptians took them from their flocks and herds,

and made them work hard in the broiling sun to build great cities. They had poor food and little of it, and were often cruelly beaten. Their lives were made bitter with hard work. But the worse they were treated the more they multiplied and increased in number, and the more frightened the Egyptians became.

Then the king of Egypt tried another way of preventing the Israelites from getting too numerous. He ordered that every baby boy should be thrown into the Nile as soon as it was born. Now, after the king had issued this order, two Israelites, Amram and his wife Jochebed, had a little baby boy; and his mother thought him the most beautiful baby that ever was, and she hid him away to prevent his being thrown into the Nile. She kept him hidden for three months, till he got so big and noisy that she was sure the Egyptians would hear him. Then she took an "ark," or basket of bulrushes, and daubed it with mud and pitch so that it would float like a little ship. She put the boy in it, and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank. When it was left there, his sister stood some way off to see what would become of him. And Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, and walked along the bank with her maids, or ladies-in-waiting, and she saw the "ark" amongst the reeds, and sent her maid to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw the child; and, sure enough, he was crying. Then she felt very sorry for him, because she saw he was

one of the Israelite babies whom her father had ordered to be drowned. When the boy's sister saw the princess open the ark, she came to see what would be done with the baby ; and she saw that the princess would like to keep him and take care of him. So she said, "Shall I find a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for you?"

And the princess said "Yes."

So his sister went and fetched his mother, and she had her son home again safely, and took care of him and enjoyed him in peace and comfort, without having to hide him away ; and she was paid for nursing her own baby, because he was the adopted son of the princess. But when he grew to be a big boy, she had to take him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he was treated as if he were her son, and she called his name
✓ Moses.



SHEIKH'S DAUGHTER TENDING SHEEP



CHAPTER II

THE REPROACH OF CHRIST

WHILE the other Israelites were being illtreated and overworked, Moses grew up in a palace, and lived like a prince. But somehow he came to know that these wretched and despised people were his kinsfolk and fellow-countrymen; and one day he went out to see them at their hard work, and he saw one of them being beaten by an Egyptian. And he looked this way and that, and there was no one else to be seen; and then he struck the Egyptian and killed him, and hid his body in the sand.

The next day he went out again, and saw one of his own people beating another Israelite. And he said, "Why do you beat him?"

But the man answered, "Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you did the Egyptian?"

Then Moses knew that some one had seen him kill the Egyptian; and soon Pharaoh heard of it, and tried to kill Moses. But Moses ran away and escaped, and after a time he came to a well in the land of Midian, and sat down there. And the seven daughters of Reuel or Jethro, the priest of Midian, came to the well, and drew water into the drinking

troughs for their father's flock. But the shepherds came and wanted to drive them away. Then Moses stood up and helped them, and watered their sheep. And when they came back to their father, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon to-day?"

They said, "An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds, and gave water to our sheep."

Jethro said, "Where is he? Why did you not bring him with you?"

So they went and fetched Moses, and in the end he agreed to stay with Jethro, and keep his sheep. Afterwards he married Zipporah, one of the seven daughters. And so instead of being a prince in Egypt, he was a shepherd in Midian, in exile from his countrymen and all his old friends.

The New Testament tells us that Moses bore "the reproach of Christ," which teaches us that those who make sacrifices for their country and their kinsfolk are serving and pleasing Christ, even when, like Moses, they have never heard of Him.

CHAPTER III

THE BURNING BUSH

WHILE Moses was keeping sheep in Midian, he was called by God in a vision to be the deliverer of Israel. The Angel of Jehovah appeared to him. He saw what seemed like flames of fire in a bush, but the bush was not burnt up by the fire.

And Moses said, "I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt."

Then God called to him, "Moses! Moses!"

He said, "Here am I."

God said, "Do not come near; take off your shoes, for you are standing on holy ground."

For in the East, when men went into a temple, they took off their shoes as we take off our hats; and the place where God appeared by His angel was holy, as if it had been a temple.

God said, "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob."

Then Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

And God said, "I have seen how my people suffer in Egypt, and how the Egyptians illtreat them; and I have heard their prayers, and have come to deliver them, and to take them to Canaan, a land flowing

with milk and honey. Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

But Moses said that he was not able to do so great a work, and especially that he was not clever enough at speaking to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. Even when God promised to tell him what to say, he still shrank from the task. But God said that his brother Aaron should go with him to be the spokesman.

Then Moses went home and said good-bye to Jethro, and put his wife and his two sons on an ass, and started for Egypt. And on the way Aaron met him, and Moses told Aaron all that God had said to him. When Moses and Aaron came to Egypt, they gathered together all the elders or leaders of the Israelites, and Aaron told them that God was about to deliver them, and the Israelites believed them, and thanked God.

Then Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto Me in the wilderness.'"

But Pharaoh said, "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey Him, and let Israel go?"

That very day Pharaoh ordered the taskmasters to make the Israelites work harder than ever. Before Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, the people had to make so many bricks a day, and had straw given them for the bricks; but now they

had to find straw for themselves, and yet to make just the same number of bricks. And they went and complained to Pharaoh, and said, "Why are we so badly treated? The taskmasters give us no straw, and yet they tell us to make bricks, and we thy servants are beaten, and it is not our fault that we cannot make bricks."

And Pharaoh said, "You are idle! You are idle! So you pretend to wish to go and sacrifice to Jehovah. Go and do your work, and make your full number of bricks, and get straw for yourselves."

As the Israelites came away from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron, and they abused them, and said, "Jehovah look upon you and judge; you have made Pharaoh and his officers hate us, and have given them an excuse for killing us."

And the Israelites no longer believed that Jehovah was going to deliver them.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEN PLAGUES

GOD did not desert His people, although they so easily lost faith in the deliverer He had sent to them. He made Egypt suffer terrible plagues, to frighten Pharaoh into letting the Israelites go. These are called the "Ten Plagues." They were—

1. The Plague of Blood. The water of the Nile was turned into blood.

2. The Plague of Frogs.

3. The Plague of Vermin.

4. The Plague of Flies.

The Egyptians were pestered first with frogs, then with vermin, and then with flies.

5. The Plague of Murrain. Their cattle all died of murrain, or cattle disease.

6. The Plague of Boils and Blains. The Egyptians were afflicted with boils.

7. The Plague of Hail. There was a thunderstorm with great hailstones, which destroyed the crops.

8. The Plague of Locusts. There came multitudes of locusts, and ate up what had not been spoilt by the hail.

9. The Plague of Darkness. For three days

Egypt was covered with thick darkness, "which could be felt," as the story puts it.

10. The Plague of the Firstborn. All the first-born children in Egypt died in one night.

Now, the Israelites were not afflicted with any of these plagues; they did not lose their cattle or their children, and, when it was dark in all the rest of Egypt, it was light in Goshen, where the Israelites were. Before each plague Moses warned Pharaoh; and, when the plague came, Pharaoh always begged that it might be taken away, and promised that, if it was, he would let the Israelites go. But each time when the plague was over Pharaoh broke his promise, and did not let them go. Only when all the firstborn died, and his own firstborn son amongst them, he allowed the Israelites to go; and they went away at once, before he had time to change his mind. But you shall hear more about this in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE EXODUS

I MUST tell you more of the story of how the Israelites came to leave Egypt at last. After the darkness had been taken away, and Pharaoh had again broken his promise, Moses told him that, unless he let the Israelites go, all the firstborn would die. But Pharaoh would not listen.

And Moses told the Israelites that after this plague Pharaoh would at last let them go; and he bade them get ready for their journey.

That night they kept a great feast. Every family killed a lamb and roasted it, and ate it together in their house, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. And, because they were so soon to set out on their journey, they ate it in travelling dress, with their long robes girded round their waist, and their shoes on, and their staves in their hands. And they ate it in haste. But before their meal, they put some of the blood of the lamb at the top and sides of the doors of their houses, as a sign that God would not kill their firstborn. This feast, which the Jews still observe, is called the Passover, because God *passed over* the Israelites when he punished the Egyptians. The New Testament speaks of Christ as "our Pass-

over," and as "a lamb slain from the foundation of the world," because Christ suffered when the Jews were keeping the Passover, and because by His death we have assurance that God will be merciful to those who believe in Him, as He was to the Israelites.

But to come back to the story. It goes on—at midnight, while the Israelites were feasting, Jehovah smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner in the dungeon. Pharaoh rose up in the night, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not one dead. Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron by night, and bade them and the Israelites leave Egypt at once; and all the Egyptians were eager for the Israelites to go, for they said, "We are all dead men." The Israelites asked them for gold and silver and clothes; and the Egyptians were willing to give them anything, if they would only go.

So they started on their journey, a very great host of men, women, and children, with many flocks and herds.

CHAPTER VI

THE RED SEA

AFTER the Israelites were gone, Pharaoh and the Egyptians began to get over their fright, and they were sorry that they had let them go. And Pharaoh got together a great army, with chariots and horses, and pursued the Israelites. Now the Israelites in their journey had come to the sea, and were encamped upon the shore, so that the water was in front of them, and the great army of Pharaoh behind them; they were shut in, and could not escape. When they saw the Egyptians, they were very frightened, and their faith failed them again.

They said to Moses, "Were there no graves in Egypt, that you have brought us out to die in the wilderness? Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians. We had better be their slaves than die in the wilderness."

But Moses said, "Do not be afraid; stand still, and see the great victory which Jehovah will win for you to-day. You have seen Pharaoh's army, but you will never see it again. Jehovah will fight for you, while you stand still and look on."

And Jehovah said to Moses, "Speak to the Israel-

ites, that they go forward ; lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea, and it shall divide, and the Israelites shall go into the midst of the sea on dry ground."

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and Jehovah drove back the sea all the night by a strong east wind, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground, and the waters protected them like a wall on their right hand and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, with all Pharaoh's chariots and horsemen.

And Jehovah said unto Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the waters may flow back upon the Egyptians."

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and when the day dawned the waters returned to their usual place. Then the Egyptians tried to flee back again to the shore. But the waters covered the chariots and the horsemen and all Pharaoh's army that went in after them into the sea ; they were all drowned, not one escaped. But the Israelites walked on dry land in the midst of the sea ; and, before the waters returned, they were all safe on the other side. In the morning they saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians strewn along the seashore. Then the Israelites feared Jehovah, and believed in Him, and in His servant Moses.

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Moses

and Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her, and they danced and played upon their timbrels, and sang :—

Sing to Jehovah, for He hath triumphed gloriously :
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

CHAPTER VII

THE WANDERINGS IN THE WILDERNESS

WHEN the Israelites had crossed the sea, they found themselves in the wilderness through which their forefathers had often journeyed on the way to Canaan, where the patriarchs had pitched their tents. But, before they reached Canaan, they wandered many years in the old nomad fashion from one desert pasture to another, very much as they had done before they went down to Egypt. And they met with God in the wilderness, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the days of old, and Elijah long afterwards. Through all their history the Israelites looked back to this wandering in the wilderness, as to the days of the patriarchs, as a time when God was very near to His people. They felt that the deliverance from Pharaoh was a token of God's love for Israel, an assurance of His care and protection.

They loved to tell how the presence of God was with Israel then, as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, and how with His own voice He gave them from Mount Sinai the laws which we

call the Ten Commandments. But the story of the wandering is chiefly the story of Moses; how, through that great leader and chieftain, Jehovah taught Israel to know Himself and His will. Through long years Moses led and governed the people, and the magic of his authority taught the wild tribes to keep the peace together, and to fight loyally side by side. And the bond of union was their common faith in Jehovah, the God of Israel. For the secret of the strength of great nations is their faith in God.

But in these days Israel was only beginning to be a nation, and to know Jehovah. The same stories which tell us of God's great goodness to them, tell us also of their ingratitude; how God gave them food straight from heaven, just as He gives us fresh air and warmth and sunshine, just as parents provide food for their children; and how they grumbled and were disobedient, just as children sometimes do, and just as men nowadays grumble against God and disobey Him, though they have far more delightful and wonderful things to enjoy than food rained down from heaven.

And so it was a long time before Israel reached Canaan; nearly all the Israelites who left Egypt died, and still their children wandered in the wilderness. But all the while, in spite of their grumbling and disobedience, Moses was still their master, and God still helped him to train them to be His people. And at last they came to the lands east of the

Jordan, and conquered the kings of that country, and settled there for a time. But when they were just about to cross the Jordan into Canaan, Moses died. He only lived to look across the river, and see the Promised Land, and then God took him to Himself.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONQUEST OF JERICHO

AFTER the death of Moses, the Israelites began to conquer the country west of Jordan, which was divided between a number of cities, each with its own king. Their new leader was Joshua, and as the stories you have been reading are taken out of the Books of Moses, which tell us about Moses, so the stories about the conquest of Canaan are from the Book of Joshua, which tells about Joshua.

It tells us that, after Moses was dead, God commanded Joshua to lead the Israelites into Canaan. They were encamped in the plain east of the Jordan, not far from the river; and just opposite, on the plain to the west of the river, stood the great Canaanite city of Jericho, which was the first city they would have to attack when they had crossed the river. So Joshua sent two spies secretly across the Jordan to find out about Jericho. They disguised themselves and got into Jericho, and lodged at the house of a woman named Rahab. But some one had seen them, and recognized that they were Israelites; and the king of Jericho heard of them, and sent to Rahab's house to fetch them. But Rahab hid them upon the roof, under a heap of flax-stalks;

and when the king's messengers came, she said that the Israelites had left her house, and gone out of the city. And the messengers hurried away to try and catch the spies before they could get across the Jordan again. Rahab made the spies promise that, when the Israelites took Jericho, they would spare her and her family; and they told her to tie a scarlet cord in her window, that they might know her house.

Rahab's house was on the wall of the city, so she let the spies down by a rope out of her window, and they went and hid themselves amongst the hills till the men of Jericho had given up looking for them; and then they crossed the river, and told Joshua that they were sure that Israel could conquer Canaan, because all the people were very much afraid of them, or, as the story puts it, "did melt away before us."

The next day the Israelites crossed the Jordan. The Ark—the sacred chest, which was the symbol of God's presence—went first, and the waters of Jordan divided before it, and left a dry passage for the Israelites. So they crossed the river and encamped before Jericho. And, at the command of God, the Israelites marched round and round Jericho, and the Ark was carried at the head of the army. For six days they marched round once every day; and the seventh day they marched round seven times, and at the end of the seventh time the priests blew with their trumpets, and the people shouted,

and the walls fell down all of a heap. Then the Israelites took the city and burnt it, and killed all the people of Jericho. But first the spies went to Rahab's house, and brought her and her family away safely, and they lived amongst the Israelites.

CHAPTER IX

THE GIBEONITES

IF the Canaanites were afraid of Israel before, their fear was much greater when they heard that Jericho had been taken and destroyed.

Some of them submitted to Israel. The people of Gibeon played the Israelites a trick, in order to make peace with them. They feared that, if the Israelites knew that they were Canaanites, they would kill them all, as they had killed the men of Jericho. So they sent ambassadors to Joshua, with old sacks upon their asses, and worn-out wine-skins patched and mended. And the ambassadors wore old clothes and worn-out clouted shoes, and they brought dry, mouldy bread with them. And they came to Joshua and said, "We are come from a far country to make a treaty of friendship and alliance with you, because we have heard what great things your God, Jehovah, has done for you. You can see what a long way we have come, for this dry and mouldy bread was hot from the oven, and these mended wine-skins and shabby, travel-stained clothes and patched shoes were all new when we started, and they have worn out because our journey has been very long."

Then the Israelites ate a very little of the mouldy bread as a sign of friendship, and made a treaty with the Gibeonites.

But, the next day but one, the Israelites came to Gibeon, and found that the city of these shabby ambassadors was really a Canaanite city close by. Then they were very angry because the Gibeonites had told lies and deceived them, and they wished to put them all to death. But Joshua would not let the Israelites break their promise, and the Gibeonites became tributary to them, and had to be their hewers of wood and drawers of water, without being paid for it.

CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF BETH-HORON

THE Gibeonites only escaped one danger to fall into another. When the Canaanite kings heard that Gibeon had made peace with Israel, they were very angry. Adoni-zedek, king of Jerusalem, sent to the kings of four other cities, and the five of them got together a great army, and laid siege to Gibeon. Then the Gibeonites sent to Joshua to help them. Joshua and his army marched as fast as they could all through the night, and came suddenly upon the Canaanites, and defeated them, and put them to flight. They chased them up the pass of Beth-horon, and killed a great many of them; and they went on chasing them down the pass, and Jehovah sent a terrible storm of hail, and more Canaanites were killed by the hailstones than by the swords of the Israelites. The Book of Joshua quotes some lines from an old book of Hebrew poetry, the Book of Jashar. "Joshua said : —

"Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon;
And thou, moon, in the valley of Aijalon.
And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed
Until the nation had avenged themselves of their enemies."

This poetry shows how long the day seemed to the Israelites; they kept on chasing and killing the

Canaanites until those who were still left escaped to their cities. Then the Israelites went back to their camp. Meanwhile the five kings had been taken prisoners, and Joshua put them to death.

After the glorious victory of Beth-horon, Joshua took a great many of the Canaanite cities. He won another victory far away in the north of Canaan, at the Waters of Merom, over the kings of the northern cities. Before Joshua died, the tribes of Israel were firmly established east of Jordan, and were masters of much of the country. But a great deal of the land still belonged to the Canaanites, and Israel had to fight many battles, winning some and losing some, before they conquered all Canaan. The settlement in Canaan made a great change in the life of the Israelites. Most of them gave up living in tents, and wandering about with their flocks and herds. They built houses, and lived in villages and towns; and had cornfields and vineyards; and made wine and oil.

III

THE JUDGES, RUTH, AND SAMUEL

CHAPTER I

DEBORAH AND BARAK

FOR a long while after the death of Joshua there was no Israelite chief who was obeyed by all the tribes. They were not united as they were in the time of Moses. Sometimes one tribe would have a little war of its own against its Canaanite neighbours; sometimes three or four tribes united against the enemy; and sometimes the tribes of Israel had civil wars, and fought against each other. They were disobedient to Jehovah, as they had been in the wilderness, and often worshipped other gods. As the Book of Judges, which tells us most of the stories about this time, says: "There was no king in Israel in those days; every man did that which was right in his own eyes." }

The leaders of Israel in these days were called "Judges," but the stories in the book which tells us about them are all about fighting. The first you shall hear is that of Deborah and Barak.

The Israelites disobeyed God, and He allowed Jabin, king of Hazor, to the north of Palestine, to oppress them for twenty years. Then they prayed to God, and He raised up Deborah and Barak to deliver them.

Deborah was the wife of a man named Lappidoth. She was a prophetess, and could teach people the will of God, and what was right for them to do; and disputes were brought to her to be settled: as the Book of Judges says, "She judged Israel at that time." But, when it came to be a question of fighting, she wanted a man to help her; so she sent for Barak, and told him that it was the will of Jehovah, God of Israel, that he should gather together an army, and conquer Jabin, and deliver Israel.

Barak said, "If you will go with me, I will go; but, if you will not go with me, I will not go."

And she said, "To be sure I will go with you; but then you will get little honour from this war, for people will say that God gave victory to Israel by means of a woman."

So Deborah and Barak went together, and gathered an army.

The Book of Judges gives us a very ancient Hebrew poem about the war with Jabin. This poem is often called the Song of Deborah. The Song tells us which of the tribes united to follow Deborah and Barak. Ephraim came and Benjamin and Machir, which was a part of Manasseh, and Zebulun and Issachar and Naphtali, Barak's own tribe. These

were the tribes in the centre and the north. But the Song says that Dan and Asher on the seacoast, and Reuben and Gilead, that is Gad, beyond Jordan, stayed at home. Reuben

Sat among the sheepfolds
To hear the shepherds pipe to their flocks.

While Deborah and Barak were mustering their soldiers, Jabin sent against them a great army with nine hundred chariots of iron, under his general, Sisera. They met near Mount Tabor, and Jehovah gave the victory to Israel. The Song says : —

The stars in their courses fought against Sisera ;
The river Kishon swept them away.

Barak pursued the chariots and all the army of the Canaanites, and they were all killed ; not a man was left alive.

But the general Sisera got out of his chariot, and ran away alone on foot, and came to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Now the Kenites were friends both with the Canaanites and the Israelites. Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him,

“Come into my tent, my lord ; you will be safe there.”

He was tired and thirsty, and he came in and lay down ; and Jael covered him with a rug, and gave him milk to drink. And he said, “Stand in the door of the tent, and if any one asks if there is a man here, say ‘No.’”

Then he went to sleep, feeling quite safe, because

these ancient tribes counted it a shameful and wicked thing to betray the stranger whom they sheltered and fed. But Jael waited till he was fast asleep, then she took a tent-peg and a mallet, and crept softly behind Sisera, and drove the peg through his temples and killed him.

Now Barak was pursuing Sisera, and he came to the tent, and Jael went out to meet him, and said,

“Come, and I will show you the man you are looking for.”

And she brought him in, and there was Sisera lying dead, with the tent-peg through his temples.

After this victory, the Israelites gained other victories over Jabin, king of Hazor, until they were quite delivered from him.

CHAPTER II

. GIDEON

AT another time, the Midianites from the east of Jordan oppressed Israel, so that the people left their fields and villages, and went to live in the mountains, in dens and caves and strong places amongst the rocks. The Israelites sowed their corn; but, when it was ripe and ready to be cut, the Midianites came in countless swarms, with tents and cattle and camels, and took all the harvest and all the sheep and oxen and asses. There was no food left for the Israelites. And the Israelites prayed to Jehovah, and He sent them a deliverer.

Gideon, the son of Joash, of Abiezer in Manasseh, was beating out wheat in the wine-press, instead of the threshing-floor, to hide it from the Midianites. And the Angel of Jehovah appeared to him, and said, "Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. Go and save Israel from the Midianites. Have not I sent thee?"

But Gideon said, "O Lord, how shall *I* save Israel? my clan is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

But Jehovah promised to be with him, and give him victory; and Gideon asked for a sign, and the angel gave him a sign. Gideon brought meat and

cakes of unleavened bread and broth; and he laid the bread and meat, and poured out the broth, on a rock before the angel. And the angel touched the food with the end of the staff he had in his hand; and fire came out of the rock, and burnt up the meat and cakes, and the angel vanished.

The same night Jehovah said to Gideon, "Take one of your father's bullocks, and pull down the altar of Baal, the false god of the Canaanites, which belongs to your father; and build an altar to Jehovah, and sacrifice the bullock upon it."

Gideon did as God told him; and when the neighbours got up in the morning, they saw Baal's altar had been pulled down, and there was a new altar built, and a bullock lying upon it. When they found out that Gideon had done this, they wanted to kill him. But his father Joash said, "If Baal is really a god, he himself can punish Gideon." So the people of Abiezer did not harm Gideon; and, when they saw that Baal did not punish him, they most likely left off believing in Baal.

About this time the Midianites, with a great many other eastern tribes, crossed the Jordan to plunder Israel, and they encamped in Jezreel. But the spirit of Jehovah came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet in Abiezer, and the people came to fight under his leadership; and he gathered an army from the northern tribes, Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali.

And Gideon asked God for another sign, and said, "I will put a fleece of wool on the threshing-floor. If there be dew on the fleece only, while all the ground round about is dry, it will be a sign that I shall lead Israel to victory."

When Gideon got up next morning, the ground was dry, but the fleece was so wet with dew that he wrung a bowlful of water out of it. Still he was not satisfied, but asked for yet another sign, and said to God, "Do not be angry with me, if I ask for just one more sign. This time let the fleece be dry, and all the ground round about wet with dew."

And next morning the fleece was dry, and the ground was wet.

Then Gideon took courage, and marched against the Midianites with a large army. But Jehovah told Gideon that the army was too large. If they got the victory, they would think it was by their own strength, and not by Jehovah's. He bade Gideon tell his men that all who were afraid might go home; and twenty-two thousand went home.

But there were still ten thousand left, and Jehovah said that these were too many; and He bade Gideon bring them down to the water, and to send home all who knelt to drink, and to keep those who stooped and raised the water to their mouth with their hands. They all knelt except three hundred, so Gideon kept the three hundred, and sent the rest home.

He and his men were on the hills, and the camp

of the Midianites was in the valley beneath; and at night he and his servant went down, and got close to some of the enemy without being found out. And they heard a man telling his companion a dream.

“I dreamed,” said he, “that a cake of barley-bread tumbled into the camp of Midian, and rolled along till it came to a tent and struck it, and turned it upside down, and laid it flat on the ground.”

“This,” said his companion, “is nothing else than the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel. God has delivered Midian and all the army into his hand.”


Gideon was much encouraged when he heard the dream and its interpretation, and he went back to his men, and said, “Arise, for Jehovah has delivered the army of Midian into your hands.”

And he gave each of them a trumpet and an empty pitcher with a torch inside it, and said to them, “Watch me, and do what you see me do. When I blow my trumpet, all of you blow your trumpets, and shout, ‘For Jehovah and for Gideon.’”

He divided his men into three companies of a hundred each, and the three companies marched down in the night, and came close to three different sides of the camp, just when the Midianites had posted fresh sentinels. And the Israelites blew the trumpets; they broke the pitchers, and waved the torches with their left hands, while they held their trumpets in their right hands; and they shouted, “The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon.” They did not attack

the enemy, but just stood, and shouted, and waved the torches and blew the trumpets. When the Midianites were awakened by such a din of shouting and trumpet-blowing, and saw lights on every side, they thought they were surrounded by a great army of enemies; and in their fright and confusion they began to fight with each other in the dark, and then they all ran away. And Gideon sent messengers, and the Israelites came from far and wide, and pursued them, and killed a great many, and gained more victories over them, and captured and slew four of their princes, one of whom was called the Wolf, and another the Raven.

So Gideon delivered the northern tribes of Israel from the Midianites, and was judge over Israel all his life.



CHAPTER III

JEPHTHAH

AT another time the Ammonites came to fight against the Israelites who lived in Gilead, east of Jordan, and the Israelites wanted a brave captain to lead them against the enemy. Now there was a man named Jephthah, whose half-brothers had driven him away from home that they might have all their father's property for themselves. And Jephthah gathered a robber band and did many daring deeds, so that all Gilead spoke of him as "a mighty man of valour," just as men in later days spoke of Hereward the Saxon or Rob Roy. So, in their trouble, the elders of Gilead asked Jephthah to be their leader, and the people and their elders swore a solemn oath before Jehovah at His temple at Mizpah, that, if Jephthah would lead them against the Ammonites, he should be head and chief of Gilead. So Jephthah consented. And the spirit of Jehovah came upon Jephthah, and he gathered an army from Gilead and Manasseh, and marched against the enemy.

But first he vowed a vow to Jehovah, and said, "If thou wilt indeed give me the victory over Ammon, and I return home in peace, the first living

thing that comes out to meet me shall be Jehovah's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering."

Then Jephthah fought against the Ammonites, and Jehovah gave him the victory; and he pursued them, and took twenty of their cities, and killed a great many of them. So Gilead was delivered from the Ammonites.

Then Jephthah went home to Mizpah, and his daughter came out to meet him, dancing and playing on the timbrel. She was his only child; he had no other son or daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! you have brought me very low, and into sore distress; for I have made a promise to Jehovah, and I cannot go back."

And she said, "My father, keep your promise to Jehovah, since He has given you vengeance over your enemies; but let me go with my companions to the mountains for two months, and lament."

He let her go, and after two months she came back; and the story says, "He did with her according to his vow which he vowed."

And there was other trouble in store for Jephthah. The men of Ephraim were jealous and angry because they had not been asked to fight against Ammon; and they threatened to burn Jephthah's house; and they insulted and abused the men of Gilead, though Ephraim and Gilead were both tribes of Israel. The Ephraimites crossed the Jordan to fight against Jephthah, but they were defeated by him and his Gileadite

followers. After the battle, the Gileadites guarded the fords of the Jordan, by which the Ephraimites would have to get back to their homes on the west of the river. When an Ephraimite came to one of the fords, and said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" And if he said "No," then they said, "Say now Shibboleth," and he would say "Sibboleth," because the Ephraimites could not pronounce "sh" properly, but said "s" instead. Then they knew he was an Ephraimite, and laid hold of him, and killed him. Altogether forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed. So Jephthah delivered Gilead from Ammon and from Ephraim, and was judge over the Gileadites.

CHAPTER IV

RUTH

THE story of Ruth has a whole book of the Bible to itself, but I have put it with the stories about the Judges, because it begins, "In the days when the judges judged." It goes on: there was a famine in the land of Israel, and there were living at Bethlehem, in Judah, Elimelech and his wife Naomi, and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion. And because of the famine, they went across the Jordan into Moab, where there was more food to be had. They lived in Moab a long time, and Elimelech died, and Mahlon and Chilion married two Moabite wives, Orpah and Ruth. When they had been ten years in Moab, Mahlon and Chilion died, and Naomi heard that through the goodness of Jehovah there was now plenty of food in Judah, and she decided to go back to her friends and her old home. So she set out for Bethlehem, and Orpah and Ruth started to go with her.

But Naomi said to them, "Do you each of you go back to your mother's house; may Jehovah deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead, and with me. Jehovah grant that each of you may find a home with a second husband."

And she kissed them, and they wept aloud, and said to Naomi, "Nay, but we will go back with you to your people."

But still Naomi tried to persuade them to go back to their old homes; and at last Orpah kissed her, and bade her good-bye, and went away home to her mother.

But Ruth would not leave Naomi; she said, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried."

So they both went on together till they came to Bethlehem. And the whole town was greatly excited about them, and the women came round them, and said, "Is this Naomi?"

Now Naomi means "pleasant," and she replied, "Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara—which means bitter—for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me; I went out full, and Jehovah has brought me home again empty."

So the two widows, Naomi and Ruth, settled down at Bethlehem, but they were very poor and lonely.

They had come just when the farmers were beginning to cut their barley; and at harvest time the poor people were allowed to go into the fields and gather up the loose ears that were dropped by the reapers; and Ruth went to glean to get a little food for Naomi and herself. And by chance she

went into the field of a very rich man named Boaz, who was a relation of Elimelech, Naomi's dead husband. And Boaz came to see how the work was getting on.

He said to the reapers, "Jehovah be with you."

They answered him, "Jehovah bless you," just as we should say, "Good morning."

He saw Ruth gleaning, and asked who she was; and they told him that she was Naomi's Moabite daughter-in-law. Then Boaz called her to him, and said she might glean in his fields all through the harvest, and must not go anywhere else.

"For," said he, "I have heard all about your goodness to your mother-in-law Naomi. May Jehovah recompense you, and may you be fully rewarded by Jehovah, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

At meal-time, Boaz made her sit down with the reapers, and gave her food and drink, and she ate all she could, and still she had some left. And he bade the reapers leave whole handfuls of ears on purpose for Ruth, so that in the evening she had a great bundle; and she beat out the corn, and took it to Naomi, with what she had left of the food Boaz had given her. And she told Naomi that she had been gleaning in the fields of a man named Boaz, and that he had been very kind to her, and had said, "You must keep with my young men till my harvest is quite finished."

Naomi said, "Yes, my daughter, you had better keep with his maidens, and not let them see you in anybody else's fields."

So Ruth kept fast by the maidens of Boaz, and gleaned with them, all through the barley harvest and the wheat harvest; and every evening she took her gleanings home to Naomi.

Now there was a custom in Israel that, when a man died, his widow had a right to ask his nearest relation to marry her, and he had her dead husband's land; but if they had a son, then the land went to him. So, after the harvest, Naomi said to Ruth, "It is time for me to find you another husband. Go and tell Boaz that he is your near relation."

Ruth did as Naomi told her, and Boaz was delighted that she had chosen him for her husband instead of some young man. But he told her that there was a man more closely related to her husband than he was, and that this nearer relation must first be consulted.

In Eastern towns people gather to talk and do business in the open space of the gate. Next morning Boaz went and sat down by the gate, and the other near relation came by, and Boaz made him sit down too. Then he got ten elders, or chief men, to sit with them, and they were ready to do business in a proper legal way. Boaz told the near relation that there was a field of Elimelech's that he had a right to buy back from a stranger who held it, and the near relation said he would buy the field.

“But,” said Boaz, “if you take the field, you must marry Ruth.”

But the near relation replied that it would be very inconvenient for him to marry Ruth. Perhaps he had wives who would have objected. “Do you,” said he to Boaz, “do you take the field and marry Ruth.”

And, according to ancient custom, he took off his shoe and passed it to Boaz as a sign that he gave up his rights to him. Then it was formally settled before the ten elders and all the people that Boaz was to marry Ruth. And in due time they were married, and had a little son, and Naomi nursed it. This little son was Obed, the grandfather of David, from whom our Lord Jesus Christ was descended.

CHAPTER V

HANNAH AND SAMUEL

THIS story, too, is not out of the Book of Judges, but out of the Book of Samuel, which tells us how the Israelites left off having judges and began to have kings. The first two stories about Samuel are also about a judge named Eli, who was priest of the "house" or temple of Jehovah at Shiloh.

There was a man named Elkanah, living not very far from Shiloh, amongst the hills of Ephraim, in the middle of Palestine. He had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none. Once every year they all went up to the temple at Shiloh to worship and offer a sacrifice to Jehovah. Now, when a sheep or an ox was killed for an ordinary sacrifice, part was burnt on the altar, part was given to the priest, but the greater part was eaten by the man who offered the sacrifice, and his friends. Such a sacrifice meant a feast, or, as we should say, a great dinner party. These yearly sacrifices were very special occasions for Elkanah's family, something like our Christmas dinners. Elkanah always helped Peninnah and her children very freely, but he gave Hannah twice as much as any one of them, because he loved her

dearly. But Peninnah was jealous of Hannah, and kept on making very disagreeable remarks about her having no children, till Hannah cried, and could not eat her dinner. So every year the great sacrifice was spoilt for all the family by Peninnah's evil temper.

One year Peninnah was as nasty as usual, and Hannah cried, and Elkanah tried in vain to comfort her. But, after they had finished, she went to the temple and prayed and wept bitterly. In her prayer she promised that, if God would give her a son, she would give him to Jehovah all his life.

While Hannah prayed, the priest Eli was watching her; he saw her lips move, but he could not hear anything, and he thought she was drunk, and reproved her sharply for coming to the temple in such a state. But she told him she was not drunk, but only in great trouble.

And he said, "Go in peace; may the God of Israel give you what you have asked for."

Then she was greatly comforted, and went and took food, and left off looking sad. In time God gave her a son, and she named him Samuel; and when he was old enough, but still quite a little boy, Elkanah and Hannah went to Shiloh, and took Samuel to Eli. Then Hannah told Eli that she was the woman he had seen praying, and the little boy was the son for whom she had prayed. And because he was God's gift to her, she wished to give him to God, to be a servant in the temple.

So Elkanah and Hannah went home, and Samuel stayed behind to help Eli. But his father and mother came to see him every year when they came up for the sacrifice, and Hannah always brought him a new cloak. And God gave Hannah three sons and two daughters besides Samuel.

CHAPTER VI

ELI AND SAMUEL

As the years went on, and Samuel grew to be a man, Eli got very old and feeble, and had to leave the care of the temple to his sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They were bad men, and took more than their proper share of the sheep and oxen which men sacrificed to Jehovah, and did many other wicked things, so that the temple got a bad name, and the people did not care to come to worship Jehovah. Eli scolded his sons, but they did not heed him.

Now Samuel used to sleep where the Ark was, in the temple, to watch over the Ark. One night Eli had gone to bed, and Samuel lain down to sleep; but the temple lamp had not yet gone out, and Samuel heard a voice say "Samuel!" And he thought it was Eli calling him, and he answered, "Here am I."

And he ran to Eli, and said, "Here am I; you called me."

But Eli said, "No, I did not call; lie down again."

But, when he had lain down, he heard the voice again, "Samuel!" And again he ran to Eli, and

Eli said he had not called, and sent him to lie down again.

And the voice came for the third time, "Samuel!" and again he ran to Eli; but now Eli understood that Jehovah was calling the lad.

And he said to him, "Go and lie down, and if He calls you, say, 'Speak, O Jehovah, for Thy servant is listening.'"

So Samuel went and lay down, and Jehovah came and called, "Samuel! Samuel!"

And Samuel said, "Speak, for Thy servant is listening."

Then God told Samuel to tell Eli that he would punish Eli and his family because of the wickedness of Hophni and Phinehas.

And Samuel lay till morning, and opened the doors of the temple; but he did not go to Eli, because he was afraid to tell him the words of God. But Eli called Samuel, and made him tell everything; and, when he had heard it all, he said, "It is Jehovah; let Him do what seems right to Him."

Not long after, the Israelites were at war with the Philistines, and they wished to have the Ark with them, because they thought that if the Ark, the sign of God's presence, was with the army, God would give them victory. And Hophni and Phinehas took the Ark to the army; but in the next battle the Israelites were defeated, Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and the Philistines captured the Ark; for sacred chests and books and vessels used in temples

and churches do not protect wicked men. When the news came to Eli, he fell from a high seat, where he was sitting, and broke his neck; and the wife of Phinehas died when she heard the news.

But Samuel grew to be a great prophet, and all Israel knew that he could teach them what was right, and what was the will of God. And when the Philistines came again to fight against Israel, Samuel prayed, and God gave Israel the victory. So Samuel judged Israel.

IV

SAUL, DAVID, AND SOLOMON



CHAPTER I

SAUL, THE FIRST KING OF ISRAEL.

WHEN Samuel got too old to judge Israel himself, he made his sons judges. But they turned out badly, like Eli's sons. If they were asked to settle a dispute, they decided in favour of the man who gave them the most money. The people were very angry, and grew tired of having such wicked judges. They thought that if they had a king, he would govern justly, and they would be better off. Just then, too, they were very much troubled by the Philistines, the Ammonites and other enemies; they hoped that a king over all the tribes of Israel would unite them, and give them victory.

Now, there was a tall, handsome young man of the tribe of Benjamin. There was not a finer man than he in all Israel; he stood shoulder high above every one else. His name was Saul, the son of Kish. One day Kish lost some asses; and he sent Saul with one of the servants to look for them. They went a long way without finding them; till at



A DINNER PARTY



last Saul said, "Let us go home, lest my father leave off caring for the asses, and get anxious about us."

But the servant said, "There is a man of God in the town close by, who has a great reputation for telling people anything they want to know. Let us go to him. Perhaps he can tell us about the asses."

Saul said, "But we have no present to give him."

The servant answered, "I have a quarter shekel¹; we will give him that."

So they went towards the town, and on their way they met some girls going to draw water, and they asked if the man of God was at home.

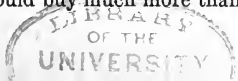
The girls said, "Yes; he has come to the town to-day to be present at a great sacrifice and feast at the high place — the temple. If you make haste, you will catch him before he goes to the high place. They don't begin the feast till he comes to bless the food."

So Saul and the servant hurried on, and met the man of God on his way to the high place.

The man of God was Samuel, and God had told him that He would send him a man of Benjamin, whom he should anoint to be prince over Israel, to save the people from the Philistines. And, when Samuel saw the two strangers coming, he knew that Saul was the man whom God had chosen to be king over Israel.

But Saul did not know Samuel, and he went up

¹A shekel contained rather less silver than there is in half-a-crown, but it would buy much more than half-a-crown will buy.



to him, and asked the way to the house of the man of God.

Samuel said, "I am the man of God; come and feast with us to-day at the high place. To-morrow I will let you go, and I will tell you all you want to know. Don't trouble about the asses; they have been found; and soon you will be master of all the wealth of Israel."

And Saul wondered what he meant. Then Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the guest-chamber. There were about thirty guests, the chief men of the town; but Samuel put Saul and his servant in the chief places; and he made the cook bring Saul a special portion that had been kept back for him. So Saul feasted with Samuel,¹ and went to his house with him, and stayed there that night. Next morning, they got up at daybreak, and Saul started to go home. Samuel went with him to see him on his way. When they were out of the city, he made Saul send the servant on in front.

Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it on his head, and told him that this was a sign that Jehovah had anointed him to be king over Israel. When they parted, Saul went home; but he said nothing to his friends about his being king. Afterwards God made the Israelites choose Saul to be king; but some evil men hated Saul, and did not wish to obey him.

¹ The picture of a "Dinner Party" in Palestine to-day will help us to imagine what the feast was like.

CHAPTER II

SAUL'S VICTORIES

ABOUT this time the Ammonites, under their king Nahash, invaded the lands of Israel east of the Jordan, and besieged the city of Jabesh-gilead. Soon he brought the city into such straits that they sent ambassadors to Nahash, offering to surrender if he would spare their lives.

But Nahash said, "I will only spare you on condition that you all have your right eyes put out, that I may mock at Israel."

The elders of Jabesh said, "Make a truce with us for a week, that we may send messengers through all Israel for help. If no help comes, we will surrender to you on your own terms."

The messengers came to Gibeah, where Saul lived. Saul was away ploughing in the fields, but they told their story to the people, and the people broke out into loud cries of grief and anger. As Saul came home from the fields with his oxen, he heard their outcry, and asked what the noise was about. They told him. And the spirit of God came mightily upon Saul when he heard of the shameful cruelty of Nahash, and he burned with fierce anger. He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces, and sent messengers with the pieces to all parts of Israel,

saying, "If any man does not come to help Saul rescue Jabesh-gilead, his oxen shall be cut to pieces."

So Saul gathered a great army, and sent back the messengers from Jabesh-gilead to tell their friends that help would come before the sun was hot next day. The men of Jabesh rejoiced greatly over the good news; and, to put Nahash off his guard, they sent out a message to him that next day they would surrender, and he should do with them as he pleased.

But next day Saul came with his army very early in the morning, and took the Ammonites by surprise, and defeated them with great slaughter. They were so scattered that there were not two left together. So Jabesh-gilead was delivered; and now Saul was most popular, and the people wished to kill those who objected to his being king.

But Saul said, "No one shall be put to death to-day, for to-day Jehovah has given victory to Israel."

Then they celebrated their victory and the accession of their new king by great sacrifices and feasts at Gilgal.

CHAPTER III

DAVID, SAUL'S MINSTREL AND ARMOUR-BEARER

THE Book of Samuel tells us two quite different stories about the way in which David and Saul first met. I cannot explain to you how these stories fit into one another, but I will tell you them separately, one in this chapter, and one in the next.

After Saul became king, he and his brave son Jonathan gained many victories over the Philistines and their other enemies, and did very much to make the separate Israelite tribes into a strong, united people. But sometimes Saul did evil, and sinned against God.

Now comes our first story. The spirit of Jehovah had left Saul, and Jehovah allowed an evil spirit to trouble him. He was gloomy, irritable, almost mad. His servants begged that they might find him a clever minstrel, who might play upon the harp, and soothe and cheer him, and put him in good spirits. And Saul said they might.

One of them said, "I have seen the son of Jesse of Bethlehem. He is a clever minstrel and a brave warrior; he can talk well, and is very handsome, and Jehovah is with him."

So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David."

Then Jesse loaded an ass with bread and a bottle of wine and a kid, and sent them with David as a present to Saul. When David came, he was presented to Saul; and Saul was greatly taken with him, and made him his armour-bearer. The king sent and asked Jesse that David might stay with him always, because he was very fond of him. So David stayed with Saul; and, when the king became gloomy and irritable, David played upon the harp, and Saul was refreshed, and got bright and cheerful again, and the evil spirit left him.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID AND GOLIATH

ONCE, when the Israelites were at war with the Philistines, King Saul and his army were encamped on a hill on one side of a valley, and the Philistines on the hill opposite. Amongst the Philistines was a giant from Gath named Goliath, about ten feet high. He was clad in bronze armour, helmet, coat of mail, and greaves,¹ and a small shield slung behind his back. His coat of mail weighed about a hundred-weight and a half. His shield-bearer went before him, carrying a large shield. This giant came down every day into the valley between the two armies, and challenged any Israelite to meet him in single combat, and decide the war.

“Choose a man,” said he, “and let him come down and fight with me. If he kills me, we Philistines will be your servants; but if I kill him, you shall serve us. I defy the armies of Israel this day; find a man to fight with me.”

When Saul and all Israel heard this challenge of the Philistine giant, they were terribly frightened. Goliath came down into the valley morning and evening for forty days, and repeated his challenge, but no one had courage enough to accept it.

¹ Armour for the feet and legs.

Now comes our second story of the meeting of Saul and David. There lived at Bethlehem an old man named Jesse, who had eight sons. The three eldest — Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah — were in Saul's camp; and the youngest, David, stayed at home and looked after the sheep. One day Jesse said to David, "Get ten loaves and some corn, and take them quickly to the camp to your brothers; and take these ten cheeses to the captain of their thousand (or, as we should say, the colonel of their regiment), and find out how they are, and bring me word."

Next morning David left the sheep with a shepherd, and went to the camp with the food for his brothers and the present for the captain; and he came to the wagons belonging to the army, just as the Israelites and the Philistines were setting themselves in array of battle against each other. David was eager to see the fighting, so he left his loaves and cheeses with the officer in charge of the wagons, and ran to the army, and found his brothers and greeted them. Just then Goliath came forward from the ranks of the Philistines, and uttered his usual challenge; and when the Israelites saw him, they were frightened and ran away. But David asked the men near him what reward would be given to the man who killed Goliath.

They answered him, "The king will make him a rich man, and he shall marry the king's daughter."

But when David's eldest brother, Eliab, heard

him talking about fighting Goliath, he was very angry.

“What did you come for?” said Eliab. “With whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the naughtiness of your heart. You came out of idle curiosity to see the battle.”

But David took no notice; he went about asking people what reward would be given for killing Goliath, and they all gave him the same answer. By-and-by Saul heard that there was a lad in the camp who talked about fighting the Philistine giant, and Saul sent for David.

And David said to Saul, “Let no one be distressed because of Goliath. I, your servant, will go and fight with this Philistine.”

But Saul said, “*You!* Fight with the Philistine! You are only a stripling, and he has been fighting ever since he was a boy.”

Then David told Saul that he had fought with lions and bears that came to carry off the lambs of his flock, and had killed them. And he was sure that Jehovah, who saved him from the lion and the bear, would help him to kill the heathen Philistine, who defied the armies of the living God.

And Saul said to David, “Go, and Jehovah shall be with you.”

He clothed David with his own armour, and gave him his sword; but David had to take it all off again, because he was not used to such armour.

And he went to meet the Philistine with nothing but his staff and a sling, and five smooth stones from the brook in his shepherd's bag. And the Philistine came on, with his shield-bearer before him, and he looked about for the enemy he was to fight with, and saw no one but a handsome, rosy-faced lad with a staff and a sling, not even a man like the shepherd in our picture.

"What!" said he, "am I a dog, that you take a stick to me?"

And he cursed David by his gods, and said, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of prey and the wild beasts."

But David said, "You come to me with sword and spear and shield, but I come to you in the name of Jehovah Sabaoth,¹ the God of the armies of Israel."

And as Goliath came towards David, David ran to meet him, and put his hand in his bag, and drew out a stone, and slang it, and hit the Philistine in the forehead; and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell forward upon his face. Then David ran, and stood over him, and, because he had no sword of his own, he took Goliath's sword, and drew it out of its sheath, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that the champion was dead, they ran away; and the Israelites arose and shouted, and pursued them a long dis-

¹ Jehovah of Hosts, a name of God used by the Israelites.



SHEPHERD USING SLING



tance; and when they came back from the pursuit, they plundered the Philistine camp.

Meanwhile Saul had been asking his general Abner whose son the stripling was. And Abner could not tell him; but when David came back again, Abner took him in to Saul with the head of Goliath in his hand. And Saul said to him, "Whose son are you, my lad?"

David answered, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

CHAPTER V

DAVID AND JONATHAN

WHEN David was brought to Saul with Goliath's head in his hand, Saul's son Jonathan was standing beside his father. And Jonathan was greatly drawn to David, so that, before David had finished speaking to Saul, "the soul of Jonathan," as the story says, "was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." From that moment they were fast friends, and even now we call two very great friends "David and Jonathan." And, because of Jonathan's great love for David, they made between them a covenant, a solemn promise that they would always be friends and brothers. And in token of this, Jonathan took off his robes, with his sword and bow and girdle, and gave them to David.

Soon Jonathan had an opportunity of showing his friendship to David. Saul made David one of his generals, and David was very successful, and became popular, so that the women sang:—

"Saul hath slain his thousands,
But David his ten thousands."

Then Saul became jealous of David, and the evil, gloomy spirit came upon him, and now, when David

played to Saul, the music did not soothe the king but he threw his spear at him twice. Afterwards he tried in other ways to get David killed. All this while David was fighting bravely for Saul and for Israel, and became more popular than ever. And Saul was even obliged to let him marry his daughter Michal, as he had promised, although he tried to break his promise.

At last Saul told Jonathan and all his servants to kill David. But Jonathan warned David, and tried to reconcile Saul to him. But after a while David had to run away from Saul's court. He went to his own house, but Saul sent messengers after him to kill him. And his wife Michal let him down out of the window, and he escaped. Then Michal put an image in David's bed, with the clothes over it to look like David. When Saul's messengers came, she told them David was ill in bed, and let them just look in. Then they went back and told the king, but Saul told them to go back and bring David, bed and all; and when they came to carry him away, they found there was nothing in the bed but the image and a pillow. Then Saul was very angry, and sent out men in all directions to hunt for David.

But David found Jonathan, and begged him to try and pacify the king, and to find out whether Saul still wished to kill David. For Saul was often generous, although he was hot-headed and passionate; and when the evil, jealous spirit left him, he

loved David as in the old times. Jonathan and David fixed upon a place where they would meet, and arranged a signal by which David might know whether it was safe for him to come back to Saul. Then David went back to his hiding-place.

Soon after, the king was keeping the feast of the new moon, and he asked why David's seat was empty; and Jonathan made an excuse for him, and said he had gone to a family gathering at Bethlehem. Whereupon Saul broke out into fierce abuse of David, and of Jonathan because Jonathan was his friend, and he threw his spear at Jonathan.

Then Jonathan knew that it would not be safe for David to come back. And he went to the place where he had arranged to meet David, and took with him a little lad to carry his bow and arrows, as if he were going to practise shooting. They came to the place; and David was hiding, so that he could see and hear them, but they could not see him. Jonathan told the lad to watch where each arrow went, and bring it back. Then he shot an arrow beyond him, and, when the lad was looking for it, he shouted to him, "Is not the arrow beyond you?"

These words were the signal to David that Saul was still trying to kill him. Jonathan sent the boy away, and David came out of his hiding-place; and they kissed each other, and wept together, and they promised with a solemn oath to God, that David and his children would always be faithful

friends to Jonathan and his children. Then they parted; David went away to hide himself, and Jonathan went back to Saul; and we do not read that David and Jonathan ever saw each other again.

CHAPTER VI

DAVID SPARES SAUL'S LIFE

SAUL kept on hunting for David, and David had many hair-breadth escapes. He gathered a band of brave men, and made raids upon the neighbouring tribes. Once when Saul, at the head of three thousand men, was hunting for David, David heard of it, and came with his men to the neighbourhood of Saul's camp. Saul was sleeping within a barricade of wagons — a *laager*, as they say in South Africa — with his general Abner by his side, and his warriors all round about him, and his spear stuck in the ground at his head. And David took one of his followers, named Abishai, and came to Saul's camp in the night. They passed through the sleeping warriors till they came to where Saul and Abner lay, and no one awoke. Abishai wanted to kill Saul, but David would not let him. Only they took the spear and pitcher of water that were at Saul's head, and got away before any one awakened.

When David had got to the top of a hill a good way off, he shouted to Abner, and to the people. He said to Abner, "You call yourself a brave man, and you pretend to guard the king, and last night he might have been killed, and you none the wiser.

See, here is the king's spear and his pitcher of water ! ”

Saul knew David's voice, and said, “Is this thy voice, my son David ? ”

David answered, “It is my voice, my lord, O king. Why do you try to hunt me down ? What evil have I done ? ”

Then said Saul, “I have sinned. Return to me, my son David ; for I will not try any more to harm you, because you have spared my life. I have certainly played the fool, and made terrible mistakes.”

But David knew that the evil spirit might come upon Saul again. So he did not go to Saul, but sent back the spear. And Saul blessed David, and they parted.

Not long afterwards Saul and Jonathan were killed in a great battle against the Philistines. And David made a poem, like *Lycidas* or *In Memoriam*, in which he lamented for Saul and Jonathan, and said : —

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided ;
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.

* * * * *

I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan :
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me :
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.

CHAPTER VII

DAVID AND THE ARK ON ZION

AFTER Saul's death, the men of Judah chose David to be their king; but Abner, Saul's general, made Ishbaal, Saul's son, king of the rest of Israel. There was civil war in Israel between the followers of the two kings, until Ishbaal was murdered by two of his own officers. Then all the tribes agreed to make David king of the whole country, as God had promised him long ago.

David gained great victories over the Philistines, so that there was no longer any danger of their conquering Israel; and he besieged and took the ancient city of Jerusalem, which had been held up till his time by the Jebusites, a tribe belonging to the old inhabitants of Canaan. After these victories David felt that he was really king, and he made Jerusalem his capital, and built himself a palace there, and married more wives.

Moreover he wished to have a temple of Jehovah in his new capital, and he bethought himself of the Ark of Jehovah. For the Israelites had no other sign of the presence of Jehovah so sacred as the Ark; and the temple which had the Ark was sure to be held in high honour. We have no one thing

now that we hold more sacred than anything else — as the Israelites did the Ark.

I must now return to the stories about the Ark. The last we heard of it was that it was captured by the Philistines; but the Ark brought many misfortunes upon them, so that they were afraid to keep it, and were glad to send it back again to its own country. Since that time the Ark had been kept in the house of a man named Abinadab. But now David went with thirty thousand men to bring the Ark in solemn procession to Jerusalem. They brought it out of the house of Abinadab, and put it on a new cart drawn by oxen, and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the cart. David and the Israelites walked before it, playing upon harps and timbrels, and castanets and cymbals.

But as they went, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah took hold of the Ark to prevent its being thrown out of the cart. Because Uzzah handled so sacred a thing too familiarly, Jehovah was angry with him, and he died suddenly. Then David was afraid to take the Ark into his new city, and it was put for a time into the house of a Philistine from Gath, named Obed-edom. When it had been there three months, David heard that Jehovah had blessed Obed-edom, and given him three prosperous months. Then David knew it would be safe to bring the Ark into Jerusalem. He set out again with a great company to fetch the Ark in solemn procession, with music and dancing, with shouting, and blowing of trum-

pets. So they brought the Ark to Jerusalem, and put it into a tent which David had set up for it. And they offered great sacrifices to Jehovah; and David feasted all the people.

But after a time David felt that it was not right that he should live in a palace of cedar while the Ark of Jehovah had nothing but a tent to shelter it; and he wished to build a magnificent temple for the Ark. He asked the prophet Nathan whether Jehovah would be pleased with such a temple, and Nathan said that He would. But Nathan had made a mistake, for Jehovah bade him tell David that *he* should not build the temple, but that David's family should always reign in Jerusalem, and that his son should build the temple.

So David reigned in Jerusalem in great glory and prosperity. He did not forget his promise to Jonathan, but he found a lame son of Jonathan's, Meribbaal, and gave him the lands that had belonged to Saul; and Meribbaal lived at the court, and ate at the king's table.

CHAPTER VIII

DAVID AND ABSALOM

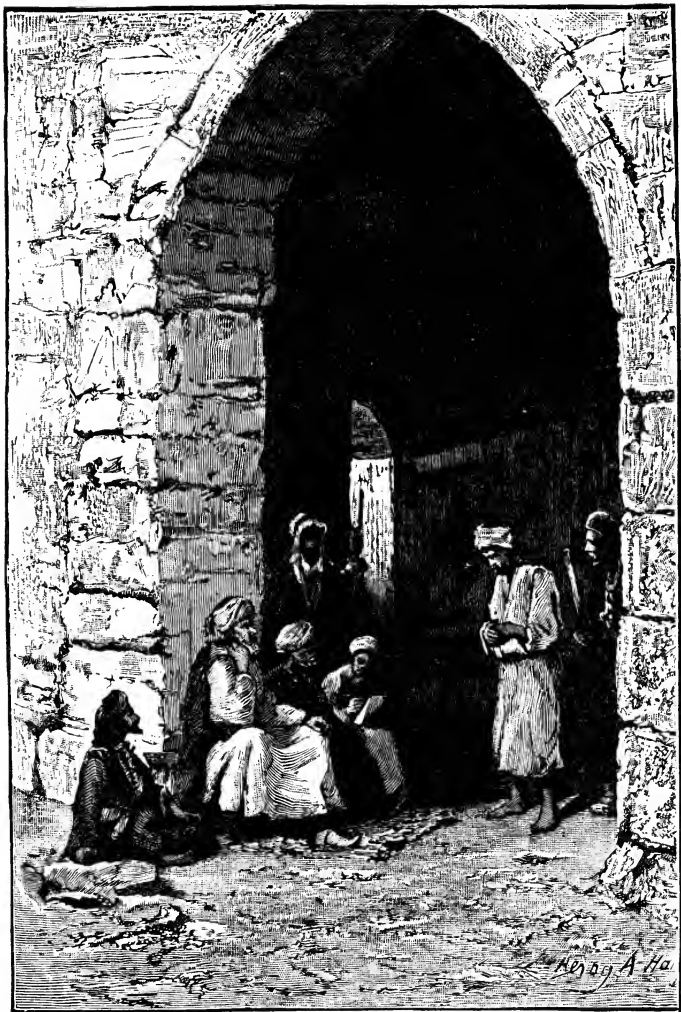
IN spite of all his glory and prosperity, David had many terrible troubles in the latter years of his reign. He fell into grievous sin, for he used the royal power to inflict shameful wrong upon one of his brave and faithful soldiers, and to bring about his death. The rebukes of Nathan the prophet soon made David feel that he had acted meanly and wickedly, and he repented bitterly of his sin. Nevertheless he suffered severe punishment.

David had a favourite son named Absalom, and another son Amnon. The two brothers quarrelled, and Absalom killed Amnon, and fled to his grandfather — his mother's father — the king of Geshur, in the north of Palestine. When he had been there three years, Joab, the commander-in-chief of the army, persuaded David to let Absalom return. But David did not wholly forgive him — he would not see him. So for two years more Absalom was not allowed to come to the court or to see his father, but at last Joab persuaded David to send for his son. Absalom came to the king, and bowed himself to the ground before him, and the king kissed Absalom, and wholly forgave him.

But Absalom was not content—he wished to be king instead of David. He was popular because he was handsome; in all Israel there was none so much to be praised as Absalom for his beauty; and he had long, beautiful hair. He set to work to make himself more popular, and to make David unpopular. He got a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. He would get up early, and post himself by the gate—like the Cadi, or magistrate, in our picture—at Jerusalem to meet the people coming to the king to make complaints and get justice done them. When any one came, Absalom would greet him, and ask his name and city, and what his business was, and would say to him, “It is quite clear that you are in the right, and judgment ought to be given in your favour; but the king is getting too old for business, and he has appointed no one else to see to it. If only *I* were judge, I should be ready to hear everybody’s case, and to do him justice.”

And when the man wished to bow down to him, Absalom went to him, and raised him up, and kissed him. So Absalom stole the hearts of all the men of Israel.

After a time Absalom asked the king’s leave to go to Hebron to offer a sacrifice at the temple there, and David let him go. Now Absalom has sent messengers through all the land, saying, “As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, say, ‘Absalom is king in Hebron.’” So Absalom went to Hebron,



THE CADI ADMINISTERING JUSTICE "IN THE GATE"



and took with him two hundred nobles from Jerusalem, whom he had invited to his sacrifice. They knew nothing about the conspiracy, but when they came to Hebron, and found people flocking in from all sides to make Absalom king, they could scarcely help joining with him. When David heard of it, he fled from Jerusalem with his friends and his body-guard of foreign mercenaries, and after many adventures he reached Mahanaim on the east of Jordan, and gathered a great army round him; and Absalom and his army crossed the Jordan to fight with David. David mustered his army, and divided it into three parts under Joab and his two brothers; and he wished himself to lead the army to battle. But his followers would not let him, lest he should be killed; they persuaded him to stop at Mahanaim while they went out to fight. And the king stood by the gate, and watched the army march out, one regiment after another. He commanded Joab and the other two generals, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom." And all the people heard him give this charge to the generals. In the battle that followed, David's army won a great victory; and Absalom was riding away upon a mule, when the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught in the oak, and he hung between earth and heaven, while the mule went away from under him. One of David's soldiers saw him, and told Joab. And Joab rebuked the man for not killing Absalom; but the

man said that they had all heard the king's command to spare his son, and he said that after that he would not have harmed him for a thousand pieces of silver. But Joab said he could not stop to argue with him. Joab took three darts and went to the oak tree, and thrust them through Absalom, and Joab's body-guard helped him to kill the young prince; and they cast him into a great pit in the forest, and raised over him a very great heap of stones. Then Joab blew a trumpet to call back his army from pursuing the rebels.

Meanwhile, David sat between the two gates of the city waiting for news; and the watchman went up to the roof of the gate, and looked, and when he saw a man running alone, he called out and told the king.

The king said, "If he is alone he brings news."

Soon the watchman saw another man running alone, and told the king; and the king said, "He also will bring news."

And the watchman said, "I think the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok."

"He is a good man," said the king, "and comes with good news."

Ahimaaz came and bowed down before the king, and said, "Blessed be Jehovah thy God, who has given you victory over the rebels."

But the king said, "Is Absalom safe?"

Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent me, your

servant, I saw a great tumult, but I did not know what it was."

The king bade him stand aside. And the second messenger came and said, "Tidings for my lord the king; Jehovah has revenged you this day upon all who rebelled against you."

But the king said, "Is Absalom safe?"

And the messenger answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise up against you to do you hurt, be as that young man is."

Then the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept, and as he went he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people, for they heard how the king grieved over his son; and they crept quietly back into the town, as if they were fugitives instead of conquerors. But Joab persuaded David to show himself to the people, lest they should be too discouraged.

CHAPTER IX

SOLOMON



WHEN David died, he was succeeded by another favourite son, Solomon, whom he had crowned king before his own death. David's victories had made Israel powerful and prosperous, so that Solomon ruled over a wide territory, and possessed great riches. At the beginning of his reign he went to worship God at the great high place or temple at Gibeon, and offered a thousand burnt offerings. And at night Jehovah appeared to Solomon in a dream, and said, "Ask what I shall give you."

Solomon said, "Thou hast made Thy servant king, instead of David my father; and I am but as a little child, not skilled in governing. And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy chosen people, a great people, too many to be counted. Give Thy servant, therefore, an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and evil."

Jehovah was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom, and said unto him, "Because you have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for understanding, that you may be a wise and just judge, I have done as you have asked. I have given you a wise and understanding heart, and I have also given you the riches and honour you did not ask for."

And Solomon awoke, and, behold ! it was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and offered sacrifices before the Ark of Jehovah, and made a feast for all his servants.

Solomon was famous for his wisdom and for his many great buildings. He built magnificent palaces for himself and for his queens, especially one for himself that took thirteen years to build, and one for Pharaoh's daughter, whom he had married. And, above all else, he spent seven years in building the palace or temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem, which came to be the greatest and, at last, the only temple of Jehovah.

And as Solomon's temple was above all other temples, so he was said to be wiser than all men, wiser even than those who were most celebrated for their wisdom — the Men of the East and the Egyptians. He was famous amongst all the nations round about for his three thousand proverbs and his thousand and five songs. He spoke of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon to the herbs, like hyssop, that grew on the wall ; and of birds and creeping things and fishes. And the kings of all peoples round about heard so much of his wisdom that they sent their servants to hear his wise sayings. And one queen, the Queen of Sheba, in Arabia, came herself to ask Solomon difficult questions, and find out if he was as wise as reports said. She came to Jerusalem with a great retinue, with camels loaded with spices and jewels and gold. She came to Solomon, and asked

him her difficult questions, and he was able to answer them all. When she saw how wise he was, and his splendid palace and luxurious banquets and crowds of finely dressed courtiers and servants, and especially the flight of steps by which he went up to the temple, there was no more spirit in her.

She said to the king, "I did not believe what I heard about your wise sayings, your wealth and your splendour; but now I have seen it all with my own eyes, and, behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity are greater than the reports of them."

And she gave the king gold and spices and jewels. Such an abundance of spices was never again seen in Jerusalem. And Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba all that she asked for, and many presents besides; and she and her servants went back to their own land.

But, in spite of his wisdom and prosperity, Solomon fell into many grievous sins. In order to build his palaces, he oppressed the people by making them work for nothing, so that they became discontented; and when he died, and his son Rehoboam refused to promise to reign better, almost all Israel, ten tribes, revolted from Rehoboam, and chose another king, Jeroboam. From that time there were kings of Israel ruling over the ten northern tribes; but the descendants of David still ruled in Jerusalem, over Judah and Benjamin.

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V

ELIJAH AND ELISHA

CHAPTER I

THE FAMINE

SOME time after this, there arose a great king in Israel, named Omri; and, like David and Solomon, he was friendly with the Phœnicians of Tyre and Sidon; and his son Ahab, who succeeded him, married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Sidon. Omri and Ahab waged long wars with the Syrians of Damascus, and gained victories over them and other enemies, so that they made Israel strong. But Ahab oppressed his own people, and encouraged the worship of false gods, especially of Baal, the god of the Phœnicians.

The stories about Elijah and Elisha tell us how Ahab and his family were punished. The prophet Elijah, from Gilead, came to Ahab and said, "As Jehovah, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain but according to my word." Then he fled, lest Ahab should kill him, and hid himself by a brook in the land east of Jordan; ravens brought him bread and meat,

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and he drank of the brook. But the brook dried up, and he went to Zarephath, a city belonging to Sidon ; and, when he came to the gate of the city, he saw a widow gathering sticks, and he called to her, and said, "Fetch me, I pray you, a little water to drink."

As she was going to fetch it, he called to her again, and said, "Bring me, I pray you, a morsel of bread."

But she said, "As Jehovah your God liveth, I have no bread, only a handful of meal in the barrel and a little oil in the jar ; and I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and bake a cake for me and my son, that we may eat it and die."

Nevertheless Elijah said, "Do not be afraid that you will starve ; go and do as you have said ; but make me a little cake first, and bring it out to me, and then make for yourself and your son. For thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the jar of oil fail, until Jehovah sends rain upon the earth."

She went and did as Elijah bade her, and she and he and her household lived many days on the meal and the oil. But one day her son fell ill, and got worse till there was no breath left in him ; but Elijah prayed to God, and the boy recovered ; and his mother believed that Elijah was a prophet, and could teach her the will of God.

CHAPTER II

THE RAIN

FOR three years there was no rain in Israel, so that there was a terrible famine. Then God told Elijah to go to Ahab, and tell the king that there would be rain.

When Ahab saw Elijah, he said, "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"

Elijah answered, "It is not I, but you and your father's house that have troubled Israel, for you have disobeyed the commands of Jehovah, and worshipped the Baals. Send and gather all Israel to Mount Carmel, with the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal that eat at Jezebel's table."

So Ahab sent and gathered all Israel and the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel; and Elijah came and said to them, "How long will you halt between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow Him; but if Baal be God, follow him."

For the people thought that Jehovah would not object to their worshipping other gods, if they worshipped him as well. And when Elijah spoke to the people, they answered him not a word.

Then Elijah proposed that the prophets of Baal should sacrifice a bullock to Baal, and he should sacrifice a bullock to Jehovah; and whichever of the

two, Jehovah or Baal, sent fire to burn up the sacrifice offered to him, should be the God of Israel. And the people agreed.

Then the prophets of Baal offered their bullock, and called on the name of Baal from morning till noon ; but there was no voice nor any that answered. And they leaped about their altar.

And Elijah mocked them, and said, "Shout louder ; he is a god ; perhaps he is in a brown study, or on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep, and must be awaked."

Then they shouted louder than ever, and cut themselves with knives and lancets, as men were wont to do in worshipping Baal, till the blood gushed out upon them. But there was no voice and no answer, and no god took any notice of them.

Then Elijah offered his sacrifice, and prayed that Jehovah would let the people know that He was the God of Israel, and that Elijah was His prophet. At his prayer the fire of Jehovah fell and burnt up the bullock and the wood and the stones of the altar. When all the people saw it they fell on their faces, and said, "Jehovah is God ! Jehovah is God !"

Then Elijah had all the prophets of Baal killed. Afterwards he told Ahab that there was the sound of abundance of rain. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel, and bowed himself to the earth in prayer. After a while, he told his servant to go and look out over the sea, but the servant came

back and said he could see nothing. Seven times Elijah sent him to look, and the seventh time the servant came back and said, "There is a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand coming up out of the sea."

Then Elijah sent him to tell Ahab to have his chariot got ready, and to make haste home, lest he should be stopped by the rain. Soon the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and the rain came down in torrents. And Ahab drove home to his palace at Jezreel as fast as he could. And the hand of Jehovah was on Elijah, and he girded up his robe, and ran before Ahab's chariot to the gate of Jezreel.



CHAPTER III

THE STILL SMALL VOICE.

WHEN Ahab got home, he told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all her prophets. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not your life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time."

Then Elijah was afraid, and fled for his life, and came to the southernmost part of Judah, to Beersheba, and left his servant there. But he himself went on further south, a day's journey into the wilderness, and found a juniper tree, and sat down to rest in its shade. And he prayed that he might die, and said, "I have borne enough; now, O Jehovah, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers."

Then he lay down and went to sleep under the juniper tree, and while he was asleep an angel touched him, and said, "Arise and eat."

Elijah got up and looked about, and saw beside him a cake of bread and a pitcher of water; and he ate and drank, and lay him down again. But the angel of Jehovah came again the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too long for you."

Then Elijah got up again, and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food to the sacred mountain of Horeb ; and there he found a cave, and lodged in it.

Then Jehovah passed by. Before Him, a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces, but Jehovah was not in the wind ; and after the wind there was an earthquake, but Jehovah was not in the earthquake ; and after the earthquake there was a fire, but Jehovah was not in the fire. And after the fire there was a still small voice. When Elijah heard the voice, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood at the entrance of the cave.

And there came a voice unto him, and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

And he said, "I have been very zealous for Jehovah Sabaoth ; but the Israelites have been rebellious and disobedient, they have thrown down Thine altars, and killed Thy prophets, and I, even I only, am left ; and they seek my life to take it away."

Elijah felt that he had failed altogether in his work for God, and was helpless and useless. But Jehovah's answer showed that He had still work for Elijah to do. He bade him anoint a Syrian general named Hazael to be king of Syria ; and an Israelite general, Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to be king over Israel ; and a certain Elisha, the son of Shaphat, to succeed himself as prophet. Hazael and Jehu would punish the sins of Israel against its God.

“Yet,” said Jehovah, “I will leave me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.”

So that Elijah was not the only faithful Israelite, and his “I, even I only,” was altogether a mistake.

Then Elijah left the cave and the wilderness, and went to look for Elisha, and found him ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he with the twelfth. As Elijah passed close by, he threw his mantle upon Elisha. And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, “Let me, I pray you, kiss my father and mother, and then I will follow you.”

And he left Elijah, and took a yoke of oxen, and killed them, and boiled their flesh with the wood of the plough and yoke, and feasted his servants. Then he set out and went after Elijah, and became his disciple and attendant.



CHAPTER IV

NABOTH'S VINEYARD

THERE was a man at Jezreel named Naboth, who had a vineyard close to Ahab's palace. Some time after Elijah's flight to the wilderness, Ahab sent for Naboth, and said to him, "Give me your vineyard for a kitchen garden, because it is near my palace ; and I will either give you a better vineyard for it, or pay you its value in money."

But Naboth answered, "God forbid that I should give you the land I have inherited from my fathers." For in ancient Israel each family held its land as a sacred possession, and it was a sin for a man to sell the family estate and leave his children landless.

But, because Naboth would not sell his vineyard, Ahab went home heavy and displeased, and lay down on his bed, turned his face to the wall, and would take no food. Jezebel his wife came to see what was the matter with him, and he told her all about Naboth and the vineyard. Then she said, "Are you really king of Israel, and cannot have a vineyard when you have set your heart on it? Get up and take food, and be cheerful. I will give you Naboth's vineyard."

So she wrote a letter in Ahab's name, and sealed

it with his seal, and sent it to the elders, or chief men, of the city where Naboth lived. And when the elders got the letter, they opened it and read it, and did as Jezebel had written. They proclaimed a fast, as if some great sin had been committed, which would bring trouble on the city. They took Naboth, and put him in a conspicuous place before all the people; and they bribed two scoundrels to bear false witness against Naboth. And the two men came in and sat down before Naboth, and accused him before all the people of cursing God and the king.

Then Naboth was condemned, and carried out of the city, and stoned to death; and the elders wrote and told Jezebel that Naboth was dead. When Jezebel got the letter, she told Ahab that Naboth was dead, and he could take the vineyard; and Ahab went down to take possession of it. But when he reached the vineyard, he found Elijah waiting for him.

And he said to the prophet, "Have you found me, O mine enemy?"

Elijah answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of Jehovah. God will destroy all your family, so that they shall no longer reign over Israel; and the dogs shall eat Jezebel by the walls of Jezreel."

Then Ahab was much afraid, and lamented, and tore his clothes, and put on sackcloth, and fasted. And the word of Jehovah came to Elijah, "Because

Ahab humbles himself before Me, I will not destroy his family till after he is dead."

Not long after, Ahab was killed in battle, fighting against the Syrians, and his son Ahaziah became king in his stead.

CHAPTER V

THE WAR WITH MOAB

NOT long after Ahab's death, Elijah was taken up to heaven, and Elisha succeeded him as the prophet of Jehovah. About the same time, the new king Ahaziah died, and his brother Jehoram became king of Israel. Now, in the days of Omri and Ahab, Moab had been subject to Israel; and the king of Moab in Ahab's time was Mesha, and he paid Ahab as tribute a hundred thousand lambs and the wool of a hundred thousand rams. But after Ahab's death, Mesha refused to be subject to Israel, and pay tribute.

Then Jehoram, king of Israel, gathered a great army, and the kings of Judah and Edom came to help him against Moab. After marching for seven days, the armies found themselves in a desert where there was no water, and they seemed likely to die of thirst.

And the king of Judah said, "Is there not here a prophet of Jehovah, by whom we may ask counsel of him?"

One of the Israelites answered, "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah."¹

¹ *i.e.* Was his attendant.

So the three kings went to ask advice of Elisha, and he bade them bring him a minstrel; and, when the minstrel played, the hand of Jehovah came upon him, and he said, "Thus saith Jehovah, Make this valley full of trenches. Ye shall see neither wind nor rain, yet the valley shall be filled with water. And Jehovah will give you victory over the Moabites."

So they dug the trenches, and next morning they were full of water. Now, when the Moabites heard that the kings were coming to fight against them, all the fighting men gathered together on the borders of Moab to meet the enemy. And the same morning they looked across to the valley, and the sun shone upon the trenches, and made the water as red as blood. And the Moabites said, "This is blood; the three kings and their armies have quarrelled, and fought amongst themselves, and slaughtered each other. Now therefore, Moab, to the spoil."

Down they rushed in a disorderly crowd to plunder the enemies' camps. But, when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up against them, and routed them. Then the three kings marched into Moab, and filled up the wells, and cut down the trees, and destroyed the towns, till they came to a great Moabite city, Kir-hareseth, and besieged it, and had nearly taken it. But the king of Moab took seven hundred men, and made a sortie, and tried to break through to the king of Edom and kill him, but they failed.

Then the king of Moab took his own eldest son, who should have succeeded him, and offered him up as a sacrifice to the god of Moab, that he might deliver his people. And for some reason, the story does not tell us plainly why, the Israelites gave up the siege, and returned home.

This is the Israelite account of these wars between Israel and Moab, as it has been kept for us in the Book of Kings. We have also King Mesha's account of wars between Israel and Moab, which was found some years ago, written upon a stone monument. Each writer tells us most about the victories of his own people. I will give you a few verses of King Mesha's story.¹

"I, Mesha, am son of Chemoshgad, of Dibon, king of Moab. My father reigned over Moab thirty years, and I succeeded him. And I erected this stone to Chemosh [the god of Moab], because he saved me from all plunderers, and gave me victory over all my enemies.

"Now Omri, king of Israel, oppressed Moab many days, because Chemosh was angry with his land . . . but Chemosh [had mercy] on it in my days. . . . And Chemosh said to me, Go, take Nebo from Israel, and I went in the night, and fought against it from day-break till noon, and took it. . . . And I took from it the vessels² of Jehovah, and offered them before Chemosh. . . ."

¹ Words in brackets are explanatory additions.

² It is not certain if this word means vessels.

The rest of the inscription is taken up with an account of Mesha's victories, with a list of the cities he took from Israel, and tells us of his buildings and roads. All these successes of Mesha probably followed the retreat of the three kings from Kir-haraseth.

CHAPTER VI

NAAMAN

IN the time of Elijah and Elisha, there was almost constant war between Israel and the Syrians of Damascus. Bands of Syrians often made raids into the land of Israel, and plundered the villages and farmhouses, and carried off the people for slaves. Once a little girl was carried off in this way, and she became a slave in the household of Naaman, a great Syrian general, and waited upon Naaman's wife. Now Naaman was very much thought of by the king and all the people of Damascus, because he was a brave and skilful general, and by him Jehovah had given victory to Syria. But he suffered from the terrible disease of leprosy.

One day the little Israelite slave-girl said to her mistress, "Would God my master were with the prophet that is in Samaria, the chief city of Israel; he would cure my master of his leprosy."

When Naaman and the king heard what she had said, the king sent Naaman to the king of Israel, with a letter, in which was written: "I have sent you Naaman the Syrian, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

The king of Israel read the letter, and tore his clothes, and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make

alive, that this man sends to me to cure a man of leprosy? He is trying to find an excuse for quarrelling with me."

But Elisha heard of it, and bade the king send Naaman to him. So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and stood at the door of Elisha's house. And Elisha sent to him a message, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be healed, and you shall be clean."

But Naaman was angry because Elisha made so little fuss with him, and said, "I thought he would come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leprosy. Are not our rivers in Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean?"¹

So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came and said, "My father, if the prophet had bidden you do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he says, 'Wash, and be clean'?"

Then Naaman went and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, as Elisha had told him; his flesh became like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

Then he and all his company went back to Elisha, and he said, "I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; now, therefore, take a present of your servant."

¹ *That is, cured of his leprosy.*

But Elisha would take nothing. Then Naaman asked for two mule-loads of earth, to take home with him, and lay down and build an altar on. Because he supposed that, as Jehovah was the God of Israel, He could only be worshipped on Israelite soil; and he begged that Jehovah would pardon him, because, as the minister of the king of Syria, he was obliged to go with his master to the services in the temple of Rimmon, the god of Damascus. And Elisha said unto him, "Go in peace." So Naaman departed for his own country; and we will hope that he sent the little Israelite maiden back to her home and her friends, but the story tells us nothing more about her.

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CHAPTER VII

JEHU

ELIJAH had been commanded by God to anoint new kings for Israel and Syria. The prophetic anointing would be a sign that these kings were chosen by God. Elijah left this task to be performed by Elisha. In the reign of Jehoram, king of Israel, the Israelites were holding the city of Ramoth-gilead, east of Jordan, against the Syrians of Damascus. Jehoram had been wounded in battle, and had gone home to Jezreel to be nursed, leaving his general, Jehu the son of Nimshi, in command of the army. At this time, Elisha called one of his followers—the Hebrew name for them was “sons of the prophets”—members of the guild or order of prophets, and bade him take a vial of oil, and go to Ramoth-gilead and anoint Jehu to be king over Israel. So the young prophet, Elisha’s messenger, came to Ramoth-gilead, and went into the room where the generals of the army were assembled, and said, “General, I have an errand to you.”

Jehu said, “To which of us all?”

He answered, “To you, General.”

Jehu went with him into the house, and when they were alone, the prophet poured the oil upon

Jehu's head, and said to him, "Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, I have anointed you king over Jehovah's people, Israel. You shall put all the family of Ahab to death, to avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and all My servants, whom Jezebel slew."

Then he opened the door and fled, and Jehu came out to the other generals, and one of them said to him, "Is all well? Why did this mad fellow come to you?"

Jehu answered, "Surely you knew who the man was, and what he came for."

But they said, "We know nothing about it; tell us now."

Jehu told them that the prophet had anointed him king over Israel. Then all the generals forthwith laid their robes on the top of the steps as a carpet of state or throne for Jehu, and they blew a trumpet, and shouted, "Jehu is king."

Jehu said, "If you really wish me to be king, see that no one is allowed to go from here to Jezreel, to tell King Jehoram that there is a rebellion against him."

Forthwith Jehu set out for Jezreel in his chariot, with part of the army. And when the watchman on the tower of Jezreel saw Jehu and his men, he told Jehoram that a company of soldiers was coming; and the king sent a horseman to see who they were, and ask what they had come for. But Jehu kept the horseman, and would not let him go back to

Jehoram. And the watchman from the tower told the king that the messenger had reached the company, but was not coming back. So the king sent another horseman, and this time the watchman reported, "He came to them, but he is not coming back; and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi, for he drives furiously."

Then Jehoram had his chariot got ready, and drove out to meet Jehu, and they met in Naboth's vineyard. When Jehoram saw Jehu, he called out to him, "Is it peace, Jehu?"

Jehu answered, "How can there be peace, so long as your mother Jezebel practises witchcraft and all her abominations?"

Then Jehoram turned his chariot and fled, crying, "Treason! Treason!" But Jehu drew his bow, with his full strength, and shot an arrow into Jehoram's breast, and the king sank down in his chariot. Jehu bade Bidkar, one of his officers, throw the body into Naboth's vineyard.

"For," said he, "remember how, when you and I rode together behind his father Ahab, Jehovah said that the murder of Naboth should be punished in Naboth's vineyard."

After this Jehu went on to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard that he had come, she painted her eyes, and put on a grand head-dress, and looked out of the window. As Jehu came in at the gate, she called out, "Is it peace? You murderer of your master!"

Jehu looked up to the window, and said, "Who is on my side?"

Two or three officers of the household looked out; and he bade them throw her down. They threw her down, and Jehu drove over her, and the walls and the horses were sprinkled with her blood. Afterwards Jehu sent out to have her buried, and they found nothing but her skull, and the bones of her hands and feet. When they told Jehu, he said, "This is the fulfilment of the word of Jehovah, which was spoken by Elijah, saying, 'In Jezreel shall the dogs eat the blood of Jezebel.'"

When Jehu was king, he put down the worship of the Phœnician god Baal, and was zealous in the worship of Jehovah. And the kings of the house of Jehu were powerful and victorious, especially Jeroboam II., who gained great victories over Syria and the enemies of Israel, so that under him Israel was almost as great as under David and Solomon, because, as the Book of Kings says, "By him Jehovah gave deliverance to Israel."

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VI

AMOS, HOSEA, AND ISAIAH



CHAPTER I

AMOS AND HOSEA

BUT Israel did not make a good use of its prosperity. There were many rich men, and powerful nobles; many temples of Jehovah, with their priests and sacrifices. But this wealth and power meant terrible misery: men got rich by making others poor; powerful nobles obtained wide estates by depriving weaker men of their land, as Ahab had taken Naboth's vineyard; so that very many families in Israel were landless, and in poverty and distress. The priests and prophets did not try to stop this wrongdoing, but were often themselves cruel and selfish. Even the worship of Jehovah at the high places or temples was superstitious and corrupt; there were idols like the calves at Bethel and Dan, and other gods were worshipped besides Jehovah.

So when Israel was rich and prosperous under its mighty and victorious king Jeroboam, a prophet Amos came to the great temple at Bethel, and de-

clared to all the people who had come to worship there, that Jeroboam should die by the sword, and the Israelites should be carried away captive to a foreign country.

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, was very angry, and bade Amos leave the country, and not come to Bethel any more. But Amos and another prophet named Hosea and others went on declaring that Jehovah would not put up with the cruelty and oppression and wickedness of the rulers and priests, but that terrible punishment would fall upon Israel. Not very long after, the king of the great empire of Assyria invaded Israel, conquered the country, captured the capital city, Samaria, and carried the Israelites, the ten tribes, captive to distant countries; and ~~they have never been heard of since.~~

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CHAPTER II

THE CALL OF ISAIAH

ALL this while, kings of the house of David had been reigning over Judah at Jerusalem, except that, for a short time, Ahab's daughter, Athaliah, who had married a king of Judah, usurped the throne after the death of her son Ahaziah. Judah was never so rich and powerful as Israel; but under a king Uzziah, who reigned about the same time as Jeroboam II. of Israel, Judah was strong and prosperous. Its prosperity was followed by the same misery and sin as in Israel. The people worshipped Jehovah, and offered many sacrifices, and celebrated solemn feasts, especially at the temple Solomon had built at Jerusalem; yet these zealous worshippers of Jehovah were often cruel and grasping oppressors, and mingled superstition and idolatry with their worship.

God raised up prophets in Judah as He had done in Israel, to tell the people that He hated the sacrifices and services of selfish, wicked men, and would punish them all the more severely, because they thought they could bribe Him to let them cheat and oppress their fellows by attending public worship, and making gifts to His priests.

The greatest of these prophets was Isaiah of Jerusalem. He tells us how he was called to be a prophet. He says, "I saw a vision of Jehovah in His temple, sitting on a lofty throne, and His robes filled the temple. Above Him were the seraphim, each with six wings, and they cried one to another, Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah Sabaoth; the whole earth is full of His glory. Then the foundations of the thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah Sabaoth.

"Then there flew unto me one of the seraphim, with a hot stone in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he touched my mouth with it, and said, This has touched your lips; your wickedness is taken away, and your sin is pardoned.

"And I heard the voice of Jehovah saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?

"Then said I: Here am I; send me."

Then Isaiah tells us how he was sent to warn the people of the terrible punishment that would overtake Judah for its sin. God told him that the people would not heed his warning, but that yet there would be a holy remnant who would be saved.

So for years Isaiah rebuked the kings of Judah and their nobles and subjects for their sins, and

warned them of the coming punishment. Most of the people did not heed his warning. Yet there gathered round him a few followers, who believed in his message, and wished to live according to his teaching.

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CHAPTER III

THE DELIVERANCE FROM SENNACHERIB

AT last punishment came upon Judah in the reign of a king called Hezekiah. He himself believed in Isaiah, and tried to do the will of God according to the prophet's teaching; but many of his nobles went on in their old ways. A good king cannot make his people good all at once.

After the Assyrians had taken and destroyed Samaria, and carried Israel away captive, the people in Judah and the neighbouring countries were very much afraid that the Assyrians would treat them in the same way. Many of them wished to get help from the king of Egypt, and to unite all Syria to defy the Assyrians and fight against them. But Isaiah tried to persuade Hezekiah to keep quiet, and to have nothing to do with the Egyptian alliance against Assyria. At last, however, the Egyptian party in Judah persuaded Hezekiah to unite with his neighbours, and with Egypt to fight against Assyria. Then the Assyrian king Sennacherib marched into Palestine with a great army, took many cities, and defeated an Egyptian army that came to help the allies. How he dealt with Hezekiah we learn from one of Sennacherib's own in-

scriptions, which says, "As for Hezekiah of Judah, who had not submitted to my yoke, I besieged and took forty-six of his strong cities and numberless smaller towns, by battering down the walls and by assault. I took 200,150 prisoners, young and old, male and female, together with horses, mules, asses, camels, oxen and sheep, too many to count. I shut up Hezekiah himself in his royal city Jerusalem like a bird in a cage."

Sennacherib goes on to tell how he gave the cities of Judah to their neighbours, and how Hezekiah submitted, and sent ambassadors to him, and paid him tribute. But Sennacherib does not tell us what happened afterwards. For the end of the story we must go back to the Book of Kings.

Although Hezekiah submitted to Sennacherib, and sent him much gold and silver, Sennacherib sent an army to take Jerusalem. His generals tried to persuade the people to give up the city to them. They said, "Don't believe Hezekiah when he tells you that Jehovah will save you. Has any god ever saved his people from the king of Assyria? All the countries we have conquered had their gods; and where are they? Did they save the people who trusted them? How, then, can Jehovah save Jerusalem from our king?"

But the people gave the Assyrians no answer, and Hezekiah's officers told him what had been said. And Hezekiah tore his clothes, and put on sackcloth, and went into the temple and prayed

to Jehovah, telling Him how scornfully the Assyrians had spoken of the God of Israel. And he sent some of his chief officers to Isaiah for advice and comfort. Isaiah sent him a message that his prayers would be answered, that Jerusalem would not be taken, that Sennacherib would not even come to attack it, but would go back to his own country another way.

That night the angel of Jehovah went forth, and slew 180,000 men in the Assyrian camp, perhaps by some terrible disease; and when those who were left got up next morning, they found them all dead corpses. Then Sennacherib, king of Assyria, set off home to Nineveh and stayed in the East till he was murdered by two of his sons.

VII

JEREMIAH

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CHAPTER I

THE PUTTING DOWN OF THE HIGH PLACES

I HAVE told you how at the high places and other temples idols were worshipped, and other evil practices carried on ; and how the prophets condemned such worship. Hezekiah did something to put a stop to it ; but, when he died, things were worse than ever. His son and successor Manasseh encouraged the evil worship at the high places, and even placed altars to the sun and moon and stars in the courts of Solomon's Temple at Jerusalem. His son and successor Amon followed in his footsteps. Amon was succeeded by his son Josiah, a child eight years old. Of course, while Josiah was a boy, the government was carried on by some of the nobles and princes.

When King Josiah was twenty-one, God raised up a prophet, Jeremiah, who was a young man like the king. When God called him to be a prophet, he said, "O Lord Jehovah, I cannot speak, I am but a youth."

“Then,” he tells us, “Jehovah put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and said, ‘I have put My words in your mouth.’”

Jeremiah, like Isaiah, was commanded to warn Judah that it would be punished for its sins. So the prophet began to preach against the selfishness, oppression, and idolatry of the men of Judah, especially of the nobles, priests, and prophets. For there were many who made a livelihood out of teaching the will of God, but only a few true prophets who really had the word of Jehovah.

The Book of Kings does not tell us anything about Jeremiah; but we may be sure that he would try to persuade Josiah to observe the law of God. We read that Josiah, when he was twenty-six, set to work to repair Solomon’s Temple, most likely because he believed Jeremiah, and was anxious to carry out his teaching.

While the temple was being repaired, the high-priest, Hilkiah, came to the king’s secretary, Shaphan, and said, “I have found the book of the law in the temple of Jehovah.”

Shaphan read the book himself, and then took it, and read it to the king. The contents of this law-book were very like those of our Book of Deuteronomy, which threatens the Jews with punishment for such sins as the men of Judah were in the habit of committing.

So when Josiah heard it read, he was much distressed, and tore his clothes. He sent his officers to

a prophetess named Huldah to ask about the book. She told them that Jerusalem would be punished for worshipping false gods, but that the evil should not come in Josiah's time.

Afterwards the king gathered the people together at Jerusalem, and read them the book. And the king and the people made a covenant, and solemnly promised to do as the book bade them. Then they set to work to clear out of the temple all the altars and vessels and furniture used for the worship of false gods. They destroyed the temples of false gods everywhere, and they broke down the high places. The king forbade the people to worship any more at the high places, and ordered them to sacrifice only at Solomon's Temple, where he and his officers could see that everything was done decently and in order. So Josiah reformed the religion of Judah as far as public worship was concerned.

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CHAPTER II

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

JOSIAH was killed in battle, and probably people took this as a sign that Jehovah did not approve of his reforms. At any rate, his successors went back to the old evil ways. Jeremiah protested, but they took little notice. Once the prophet came forward in the temple at a great feast, and told the people that Jerusalem and its temple would be destroyed, as Shiloh and its temple had been destroyed long ago.

This saying, that Jehovah's one holy temple would be destroyed, seemed so wicked and blasphemous, that the priests and prophets and people laid hold of Jeremiah, and dragged him before the princes of Judah to have him put to death. But some of the princes were his friends, and protected him.

Yet, at one time and another, Jeremiah was greatly persecuted, because he persisted in warning the people of the punishment that must follow their sins. Once he was beaten, and put in the stocks.

Meanwhile, the punishment of Judah was coming very near. The empire of the Assyrians, who had once ruled over Western Asia, had been overthrown by the Chaldeans of Babylon and their allies, and Judah had to submit to them. And now, as in the



HIGH-PRIEST WEARING THE EPHOD



time of Isaiah, there was an Egyptian party at Jerusalem who wished to join Egypt and the neighbouring countries, and rebel against Babylon. But Jeremiah, like Isaiah, tried to persuade the kings of Judah to keep quiet, and to have nothing to do with Egypt. Sometimes they followed Jeremiah's advice, but, as a rule, they revolted whenever there seemed the least chance of success.

The last king of Judah was Zedekiah, one of the sons of Josiah. He, too, rebelled against Babylon, and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came against him with a great army. Jeremiah tried to persuade Zedekiah to submit, and he was inclined to do so. But the princes who wished to join Egypt prevented the king from submitting. They arrested Jeremiah on a charge of intending to desert to the Chaldeans, and let him down into a muddy pit, and he sank in the mud. Most likely they meant to let him starve to death in the pit. But Jeremiah had a friend in the king's household, an Ethiopian, Ebedmelech. When he heard what had happened, he got the king's permission to take Jeremiah out of the pit. Ebedmelech provided himself with ropes, and a number of old rags, and thirty men, and went to the pit, and let down the ropes and rags to Jeremiah. Jeremiah fastened the ropes under his armpits, with the rags between his flesh and the ropes. Then they drew him up out of the pit, but he still remained in prison.

Not long after, the city was taken by the Chal-

deans. The city and temple were destroyed, many of the people were killed, and many more were carried away captive to Babylon. Some were allowed to stay in Judah, amongst them Jeremiah, who was released from prison, and treated with great respect. But those who were left in Judah fled into Egypt, and took Jeremiah with them; and the last that we hear of the prophet is that he had to rebuke his fellow-countrymen in Egypt, and especially the women, for their wickedness and idolatry.

VIII

RELIGIOUS STORIES OF ANCIENT ISRAEL



CHAPTER I

THE CREATION

WE have come to an end of the stories about the Israelite kingdoms. Next I want to tell you some of the stories through which the Israelites were taught many useful lessons, especially that their God Jehovah was God of the whole world, and made men and women and all things. They are often thought to be rather poems or parables than history. The Babylonians had stories very much like these Israelite stories, only the Babylonian stories do not teach true and helpful lessons like those of the Bible.

The first is about the Creation. There was a time when there were no trees or plants, because there had never been any rain, and there were no men to do any gardening. First of all, a mist used to come up and water the earth. Then Jehovah made a man out of the dust, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that the man became

alive. Then Jehovah planted a garden in the East, in Eden, and put the man in it to take care of it.

And Jehovah commanded him, "You may eat the fruit of every tree in the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You must not eat the fruit of that tree, else you will die."

Then Jehovah thought, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a companion for him."

So Jehovah made out of the soil all the animals and birds; and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and in this way they all got their names. But no one of them was fit to be the man's companion. Then Jehovah made the man fall into a very sound sleep, and He took out one of his ribs, and closed up the place; and out of the rib He built up a woman, and brought her to the man.

And the man said, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

And he called her name *Ishshah*, which means *woman*, because she was taken out of *man*; for the Hebrew for man was *ish*. And the man and his wife were naked and not ashamed.

CHAPTER II

THE FALL

Now the serpent was more cunning than any other animal which Jehovah had made.

And he said to the woman, "Has God really said that you may not eat of any of the trees of the garden?"

She answered, "We may eat the fruit of all the trees, except the one in the middle of the garden. Of that, God said, 'You must not eat it, or touch it, else you will die.'"

The serpent said to her, "You certainly will not die. God knows that, if you eat the fruit of that tree, your eyes will be opened, and you will know good and evil, and will be as wise as He is Himself."

She saw that the fruit was nice and pretty, and she wanted to be wise; so she took some and ate it, and made her husband eat some too. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the sound of Jehovah, as He walked in the garden, in the cool of the day; and they hid from Him amongst the trees of the garden.

But Jehovah called to the man, "Where are you?"

He answered, "I heard Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself."

Jehovah said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten the fruit I forbade you to eat?"

The man said, "The woman whom you gave me for a companion made me eat the fruit."

Jehovah said to the woman, "How came you to do this?"

She said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate the fruit."

Then Jehovah said that all three would be punished: the serpent would have to crawl upon its belly, and eat dust; the woman would suffer much pain, and be subject to her husband; and the man would have to work very hard for a living.

Then Jehovah made skin coats for the man and his wife to wear; and they were driven out of the garden of Eden, to till the waste lands outside. And, east of the garden of Eden, Jehovah placed the cherubim with flaming swords pointing every way, to keep the man and woman from ever getting back into Eden.

CHAPTER III

CAIN AND ABEL

THE man and woman — Adam and Eve they were called — had two sons, Cain and Abel. When they grew up, Abel kept sheep, and Cain grew corn and fruit. Cain brought to Jehovah an offering from his fields, and Abel brought the firstlings of his flock. Jehovah was pleased with Abel and his offering, but He was displeased with Cain and his offering. Whereupon Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

Jehovah said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, shall I not be pleased with you? But if you do ill, sin crouches at your door, and lies in wait for you. Yet you may master it."

But Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go into the field."

And, when they were in the field, Cain turned upon Abel, and murdered him.

And Jehovah said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

He answered, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

But Jehovah said, "What have you done? Your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground. This

land shall no longer give you corn when you till it, but you shall be a fugitive and wanderer in the earth."

Cain said, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Thou hast driven me out from this land; and I shall be hidden from Thee; and I shall be a fugitive and wanderer in the earth. Any one who meets me will kill me."

But Jehovah said, "If any one kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken upon him."

And Jehovah set a mark upon Cain, lest any one who met him should kill him.

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CHAPTER IV

THE FLOOD

As time went on, there came to be a great many people in the world, and Jehovah saw that they were very wicked; and He said, "I will destroy mankind and the beasts and birds and creeping things, for I am sorry that I made them."

But there was one good man, Noah, with whom Jehovah was pleased; and he bade him build a great floating house or "ark." When the ark was finished, Jehovah bade Noah and all his family go into it, and take with them seven of each kind of clean beast that might be eaten and two of each kind of unclean beast that might not be eaten. He told Noah that in a week He would send a great rain, and it would keep on raining for forty days and forty nights, and every living thing on the earth would be drowned. And Noah did all that Jehovah told him. He and his sons and their wives went into the ark, and the beasts and birds with them; and Jehovah shut him in. Seven days later the flood began, and it rained for forty days and forty nights. The water rose, and floated the ark; and every living thing, men and women and children, beasts and birds, were drowned. None were left except Noah and those with him in the ark.

When the rain stopped, at the end of the forty days, the waters began to go down. And Noah opened the window of the ark, and sent out a raven; but the raven never came back, it flew to and fro till the water had dried up. Then Noah sent out a dove, to see if the water had gone down from the land. And the dove found no rest for the sole of its foot, because the earth was still covered with water; and it came back to the ark to Noah, and he put out his hand, and took it in. Then he waited a week, and sent out the dove again; and it came back in the evening with a fresh olive leaf in its beak. Then Noah knew that the land was free from water. But he waited another week, and sent out the dove again, but it never came back.

At the end of the week Noah took the roof off the ark, and looked, and saw that the ground was dry; and Noah and his family came out of the ark. He built an altar to Jehovah, and took some of every kind of clean beast and bird, and sacrificed them as burnt-offerings. And Jehovah smelt the pleasant smell of the smoke, and said to Himself, "I will not curse the ground any more, to punish men, because from childhood they are given to evil thoughts; and I will not again destroy every living thing, as I have done by the flood. While the earth lasts, there shall always be seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night."

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CHAPTER V

THE TOWER OF BABEL

IN ancient times, everybody spoke the same language, and lived together as one people. And, as they journeyed eastward, they found a plain in a country called Shinar, and settled down there, and said, "Let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly."

And they had brick for stone and pitchy mud for mortar.

Then they said, "Let us build a city and a tower, whose top may reach to heaven, and be a landmark for us, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

But Jehovah came down to look at the city and tower that men were building, and said, "They are all one people, and speak the same language; and what they are doing is only a beginning; if they succeed in this, they will do everything they wish. Let us go down and confuse their language, that they may no longer be able to understand each other."

Then Jehovah made them speak different languages, so that they could no longer understand one

another ; scattered them abroad from thence over all the face of the earth ; and they left off building the city. And the place was called Babel or Confusion, because of the confusion of languages there.

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IX

THE NEW ISRAEL



CHAPTER I

THE NEW TEMPLE

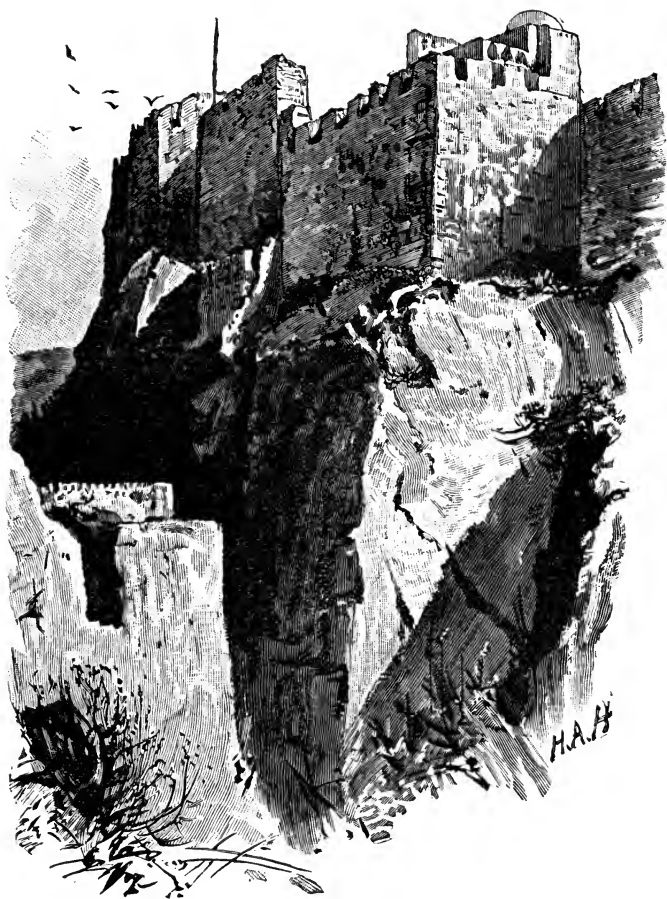
THE destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, together with the exile to Babylon, mark the beginning of a new Israel. This new Israel was chiefly the survivors of Judah and Benjamin, especially the exiles at Babylon. After they had been some time at Babylon, God raised up prophets, who told the exiles that they should return to their own land, and that Jerusalem and the temple would be rebuilt. About fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, Cyrus, king of Persia, overthrew the Chaldean Empire, and took Babylon. He allowed the exiles to return to Palestine, and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. Some of them went to Palestine, but very many stayed in Babylon. Though they still called themselves Israel, they are generally spoken of as Jews, or men of Judah, and their country as Judæa.

The returning exiles went back to a desolate country, and a ruined city and temple. During the

exile, neighbouring tribes had taken some of the land of Judah. They wished to have a share in building the temple ; and, when the Jews refused, they were angry, and did all they could to injure them and hinder their building.

The foundations of a new temple were laid, to the music of trumpets and cymbals ; and the priests sang hymns and praised Jehovah, and the people shouted aloud for joy, because the foundation of the temple of Jehovah was laid. But the very old men, who remembered the former temple, wept aloud, and the shouts of joy were mingled with wailing and lamentation, so that the one could not be distinguished from the other. But the noise could be heard a great way off.

After the foundation was laid, the enemies of the Jews persuaded the king of Persia to stop the building, and it was many years before the Jews could get permission to go on with it. But at last the temple was finished, and opened by a solemn dedication, with feasts and sacrifices and great rejoicings.



A BIT OF THE WALL OF JERUSALEM: THE NORTH ANGLE





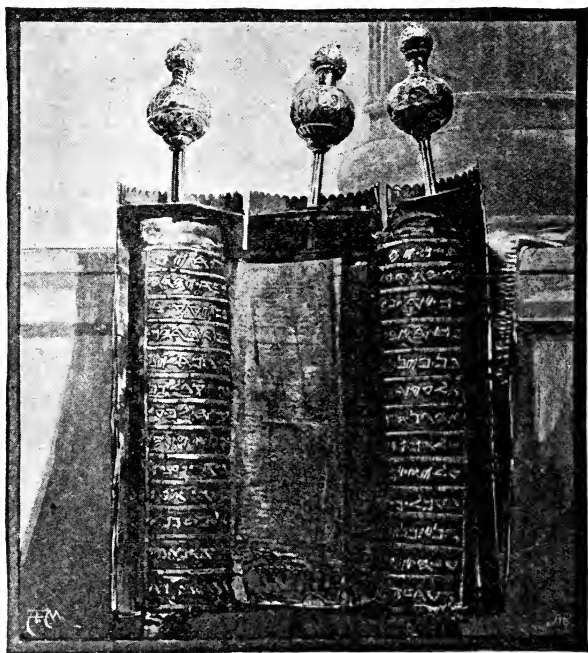
CHAPTER II

EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

THE troubles of the Jews were not over when the new temple was built. They were still poor and weak, and had many enemies. They were not so much given to idolatry and superstition as the old Israelites, but still they fell into many of the sins against which Amos and Isaiah prophesied. In times of distress the rich took advantage of the necessities of the poor to get possession of their land, and to sell their debtors for slaves. Some of the Jewish nobles married heathen wives, and gave their daughters to heathen husbands, so that it seemed likely that soon they would worship false gods as well as Jehovah.

But help came from the Jews who had stayed behind in Babylon. There was in Babylon a Jewish priest named Ezra, who was called "The Scribe," because he was learned in the law; and also a Jew named Nehemiah, who held the high office of cup-bearer to the Persian king. Ezra came to Jerusalem with a large company of Babylonian Jews. Not long after, Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judah by the Persian king, and also came to Jerusalem. He built strong walls for the city, so that

it could not be taken by the enemy, and he made the rich who had taken land from the poor restore it to the former owners, and he set things in order generally.

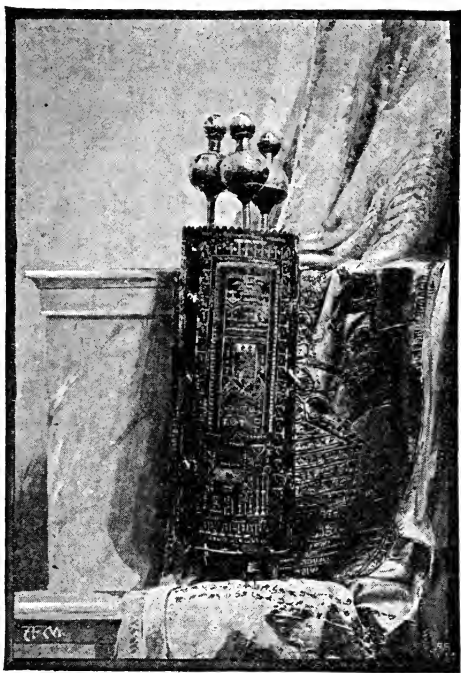


ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS OF THE PENTATEUCH

Now, Ezra had brought with him from Babylon a book of the Law, something like the book found in the temple in Josiah's reign, but with more laws in it, and better suited to the New Israel. It was either our Pentateuch — that is, Genesis, Exodus,

Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy — or something very much like it.

Ezra and Nehemiah gathered all the people together in a large open space before one of the gates



ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS OF THE PENTATEUCH ROLLED UP

of Jerusalem. And Ezra took with him the book of the Law, and stood upon a pulpit of wood, which had been specially made for the occasion, and opened the book in the sight of all the people ; and all the people stood up. Then, Ezra blessed Jehovah, the

great God, and all the people answered, "Amen! Amen!" and lifted up their hands. Then they bowed their heads, and worshipped Jehovah with their faces to the ground.

Then Ezra read the book to the people, men and women, and all who were old enough to understand; and the Levites, or assistant priests, explained the laws to the people. And Ezra read from daybreak to noon, and went on reading every day for a week.

And the people and their priests and rulers solemnly promised by a covenant to keep these laws, as Josiah and his people promised to keep the laws in the book found in the temple.

For the most part, they and the Jews of later generations kept this covenant, and no longer fell into idolatry, or into the old superstitions. But they were often guilty of other sins, and were so busy attending to all the laws that told them what kind of meat to eat, and how often they should wash themselves, that many of them forgot the teaching of the prophets on kindness and justice.

Yet in many ways they knew more about God and His will than their fathers had done, and kept up in the temple the worship of one invisible, all-ruling God without idols. Till our Lord Jesus Christ came, there was a Jewish people in Palestine, sometimes ruled by their own priests, and sometimes by governors appointed by Persian or Syrian or Egyptian kings or by the Romans. Besides these, there

were Jews in Babylon, and Jews in Egypt, Jews almost everywhere throughout the Roman Empire and in the East. And all these Jews were looking for a Saviour who should deliver Israel, and bring the whole world to know and serve Jehovah.

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X

RELIGIOUS STORIES OF THE NEW ISRAEL



CHAPTER I

THE CREATION

GOD had taught the Jews more about Himself and His will than the ancient Israelites had known. So that it was natural that the Jews should tell the old stories in a new way, to teach the old lessons more clearly and forcibly, and to teach new lessons as well. I will tell you two of these new editions of old stories; first, the story of the Creation.

In the beginning God created heaven and earth. The earth was empty and desolate, and darkness was upon the face of the sea; and the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters.

God said, "Let there be light."

Light shone out, and God saw that it was good; and He separated the light from the darkness, and called the light Day, and the darkness Night. And evening and morning were one day.

God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, to divide them into two parts."

So God made the firmament, which divided the waters in the sea beneath it from the waters in the clouds above it. God called the firmament Heaven. And evening and morning were a second day.

God said, "Let the lower waters be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear."

Then the waters were gathered together, and the dry land appeared; and God called the dry land Earth and the water Seas. And God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let the earth produce grass and plants and fruit trees."

Then grass and plants and trees grew out of the earth, and God saw that it was good. And evening and morning were a third day.

God said, "Let there be lights in heaven to separate day from night, and to fix seasons, and days and years, and to give light upon the earth."

So God made two great lights, the greater to rule the day, and the lesser to rule the night; and also the stars; and He set them in the firmament of heaven. And God saw that it was good. And evening and morning were a fourth day.

God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly in the open firmament of heaven."

So God created the great sea-monsters and all the living creatures that swim in the sea and all the different kinds of birds. And God saw that it was good. And He blessed them, and bade them multi-

ply, and fill the seas, and the birds to multiply as well. And evening and morning were a fifth day.

God said, "Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures, cattle and creeping things and wild beasts."

So God made all the different kinds of cattle and creeping things and wild beasts. And God saw that it was good.

God said, "Let us make Man in our image, after our likeness; and let them be masters of all the fishes and birds and cattle, and of all the earth and every creeping thing upon it."

So God made Man in His own image. In the image of God He created him. He created them male and female; and blessed them, and bade them multiply, and rule over the earth and all living creatures; and said, "I have given you corn and fruit for food, and to the beasts and birds and creeping things I have given grass for food."

And God saw all that He had made, and it was very good. And evening and morning were the sixth day.

So heaven and earth, and all that is in them, were finished.

On the seventh day, God finished His work, and rested from all the work He had done. And God blessed and hallowed the seventh day, because that in it He rested from all His work of making and creating.

CHAPTER II

THE FLOOD

THIS is the story of Noah. Noah was a pious, blameless man who lived in fellowship with God. He had three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

God saw that all men had become very wicked, and he said to Noah, "I am going to destroy mankind because of their wickedness. Build yourself an ark of wood, with cells in it and pitched inside and outside with pitch; an ark 600 feet long, 100 feet high, and 60 feet broad, with openings for light and a door and three stories of cells. For I am going to send a flood to drown all living creatures. But I will make a covenant with you; and you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives shall come into the ark, and bring with you two of every kind of birds and beasts and creeping things and food for yourselves and for them." And Noah did what God told him.

In the 600th year of Noah's life, the 17th day of the second month, all the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. That very day Noah and his family and all the animals went into the ark. The waters rose, and the ark floated; they went on rising, and

all the hills were covered; they rose higher still and the mountains were covered, and all the birds, cattle, wild beasts and creeping things, and all mankind were drowned.

The waters went on rising for 150 days. Then God remembered Noah and his family and the animals with him in the ark; and God made a wind pass over the earth to dry up the waters. And the fountains of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped. On the 17th day of the seventh month, the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, or Armenia. The waters went on falling until, on the 1st day of the tenth month, the tops of the mountains were seen. On the 1st day of the first month of Noah's 601st year, the waters were gone from the earth; and on the 27th day of the second month, the earth was quite dry.

Then, at God's command, Noah and his family and the animals went out of the ark. And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said, "Multiply, and fill the world again with people. All living creatures shall be afraid of you, and you shall be their masters. You may eat animals as well as vegetables, but you must not eat the blood. I will punish any animal or man that kills a man. Only if any one sheds man's blood, by man shall *his* blood be shed; because man was made in the image of God. I will make a covenant with you, and with all your descendants, and with all living things for ever, that I will never again drown all living

creatures with a flood. For a sign of this, I will set my bow — the rainbow — in the cloud, so that when the clouds gather I may remember the everlasting covenant between Me and every living creature, that I will not again send a flood to drown them all."



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